

**THE OFFICIAL HISTORY OF  
AUSTRALIA IN THE WAR  
OF 1914-1918**

**VOLUME IV  
THE A.I.F. IN FRANCE:  
1917**





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THE  
AUSTRALIAN IMPERIAL FORCE  
IN FRANCE  
1917

BY  
C. E. W. BEAN

*With 423 illustrations and maps*

*ELEVENTH EDITION*

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## PREFACE

THIS volume discovers four of the five Australian infantry divisions expecting relief after their most depressing experience, the winter of 1916-17 on the Somme. It next tells how, before that relief came, the Germans carried out, under the eyes of two British armies, an evacuation more extensive, if much less dangerous, than that executed by the Australian and other forces in Gallipoli. This episode is closely traced in the narrative, since the Australians for nearly a month were responsible for about half the front affected, and it is possible, for once, to prove from the records of the actual scouts, how difficult it is, even with the most vigilant reconnaissance, to prevent the orderly withdrawal of a well-organised modern army. There follow the "pursuit" of the enemy by two small columns and three weeks' village-fighting under conditions of semi-open warfare; then, on arrival at the Hindenburg Line, the two terrible attempts to force that line at Bullecourt, one of these being the first experiment with massed tanks, and each involving a "soldiers' battle" of extraordinary interest, fought under highly adverse conditions. After these there comes at last, for most of the Australian infantry, its promised rest, generous beyond all hopes, while the hardest grained of the divisions, the 4th, together with the youngest and least tried, the 3rd, engages in an offensive very differently conducted from any within previous experience of the Australian infantry in France, the Battle of Messines. The volume ends with the participation of the two Anzac corps as the central striking force in the second of the three phases of what is popularly known as the "Battle of Passchendaele." The world has forgotten, if indeed it ever realised, that the story of this phase was for the most part one of unimpeded success. An endeavour is here made to show the reason, which is not, it is contended, to be found merely in the fine weather or the effectiveness of the two Anzac corps, although they now formed a highly expert and formidable force.

In all this severe fighting the Australian divisions lost heavily. As only small reinforcements were now arriving from Australia, a serious problem of maintenance lay ahead;

and the volume ends with the necessary withdrawal of the divisions to a quiet front.

The discrepancy between the developments of battle as described in the higher official reports, and as they appear actually to have occurred, has never been more deeply impressed upon the writer than in the present compilation. Perhaps the most striking example is afforded by the reference of the Commander-in-Chief to the First Battle of Bullecourt, quoted on *pages 351-2*; but at Messines and Polygon Wood also the leaders were unaware, both at the time and afterwards, of certain critical situations. The fact that, at a crucial moment at Messines, the 13th Australian Infantry Brigade extended the Australian line to cover nearly half the entire battle-front, and so filled a vital gap, is witnessed in the records of the 57th British Brigade, which was beyond the gap, and which says that it met the Australian flank that night; and in the records of the troops that were to have intervened, who state that they saw Australians and 57th Brigade closing in in front of them; and in the records of the 52nd Australian Battalion, which filled the gap and was thereafter reinforced by the gradual arrival of the intervening brigade. But the truth appears to have been totally unknown to the higher staffs, and even the commander of one of the brigades concerned expressed himself as "simply astounded" when the present narrative was submitted to him.

The writer is indebted to innumerable officers and men, both Australian and British, for their generous help. The British Official Historian, Sir James Edmonds, has given most valuable advice, and the Australian War Memorial, the Canadian Historical Section, the Historical Section of the French Ministry of War, and the German *Reichsarchiv* have courteously responded to all requests for assistance.

C. E. W. B.

SYDNEY.

*28th September, 1932.*

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## CHRONOLOGY FOR 1917

(*Italic type indicates events dealt with in this volume.*)

- Jan. 9—Raid on Rafa in Sinai.
- „ 31—Germany announces commencement (on Feb. 1) of unrestricted submarine campaign.
- Feb. 24—*German withdrawal on the Somme discovered.*
- March 11—British occupy Baghdad. Allies attack in Macedonia
- „ 12—Russian revolution begins.
- „ 26—First Battle of Gaza.
- April 6—United States declare war on Germany.
- „ 9—*Battle of Arras begins.*
- „ 11—*First attack at Bullecourt.*
- „ 16—French offensive (Nivelle's) on the Aisne.
- „ 28—Congress of United States adopts conscription.
- May 3—*Second attack at Bullecourt.*
- „ 15—Pétain succeeds Nivelle.
- „ 23—Italian offensive in Carso.
- June 3—Austrian counter-offensive in Carso.
- „ 7—*Battle of Messines begins.*
- „ 25—American troops begin to land in France.
- July 1—Russian offensive under Brusilov begins.
- „ 10—*Germans attack at Nieuport.*
- „ 14—German Chancellor (Bethmann Hollweg) resigns.
- „ 31—*Third Battle of Ypres begins.*
- Aug. 15—*British diverting attack at Lens.*
- „ 19—Italian attack in Carso.
- Sept. 1—German attack on Riga (town falls on Sept. 3).
- „ 4—Great aeroplane raid on London.
- „ 10—Kerensky declares himself dictator.
- „ 20—*Renewed effort at Ypres begins (Battle of Menin Road).*
- „ 24—Second great aeroplane raid on London.
- Oct. 19—Last great Zeppelin raid on England (5 of 13 Zeppelins lost)
- „ 21—Americans take over part of the French line in France.
- „ 24—Austrians break through Italians at Caporetto.
- „ 31—Third Battle of Gaza.
- Nov. 8—Kerensky deposed by Bolsheviks under Lenin.
- „ 15—Clemenceau becomes Premier of the French Republic.
- „ 20—British attack at Cambrai.
- „ 30—German counter-attack at Cambrai.
- Dec. 1—German East Africa cleared of enemy.
- „ 9—Jerusalem taken.
- „ 12—Roumania agrees to armistice.
- „ 15—Russians sign armistice terms at Brest-Litovsk.
- „ 20—Australia rejects conscription (second referendum).



## CHAPTER I

### PLANS OF THE ALLIES FOR 1917

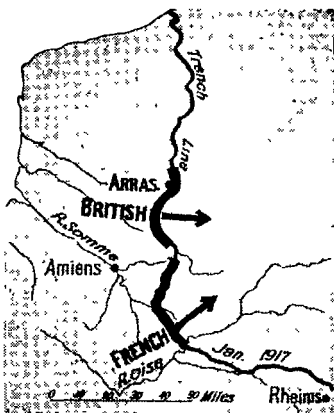
IN 1917—if the plans agreed to in the previous November at Chantilly were carried through—the Allies would again strike at their enemy from all sides, but with even greater force than in 1916.<sup>1</sup> This year their combined strength would reach its maximum, and they not unreasonably believed that the Central Powers, who had been heavily strained by the tremendous pressure in 1916, would collapse under the weight of their concentric blows. It is true that Roumania would now play a greatly diminished part: Germany, by a wonderful effort notwithstanding the pressure on the Somme, had detached sufficient force to batter that minor opponent, and incidentally to furnish all other small surrounding nations with an object lesson of the risk of throwing in their lot against her. The position in Russia also was uncertain: the reactionary tyrannical machinery by which czardom had been maintained was being allowed by a weak Czar to run of itself, and a decisive struggle between czardom and the elements of reform was obviously imminent; but the British Government believed that it was the weak

<sup>1</sup> The published works chiefly relied on in the account given in this and other chapters of the plans of the Allies and Central Powers for 1917 are:—Asquith, *Memories and Reflections*; *The Diary of Lord Bertie*, Buchan, *History of the Great War*; Churchill, *The World Crisis, 1916-18, Part II*; Grey, *Twenty-Five Years*; Haig, *Despatches*; Dewar and Boraston, *Sir Douglas Haig's Command*; Charteris, *Field-Marshal Earl Haig*; Jellicoe, *The Crisis of the Naval War*, Arthur, *Life of Kitchener*; Maurice, *Life of Lord Rawlinson*; Repington, *The First World War*; Robertson, *Soldiers and Statesmen*; Callwell, *Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson*; *The Memoirs of William Jennings Bryan*; Seymour, *The Intimate Papers of Colonel House*; Hendrick, *Life and Letters of Walter H. Page*; Scott, *A Survey of International Relations between United States and Germany, 1914-1917*; Baker, *Woodrow Wilson and World Settlement*; de Civrieux, *L'Offensive de 1917 et le Commandement du General Nivelle*, Hanotaux, *Histoire Illustrée de la Guerre*, Mangin, *Comment Finit la Guerre*; Mermeix, *Joffre, Le Commandement Unique*, and Nivelle et Painlevé; Painlevé, *Comment j'ai nommé Foch et Pétain*, Palat, *L'Année d'Angoisse, 1917*; Pierrefeu, *French Headquarters*; Ribot, *Letters to a Friend*; Carnegie Endowment, *Official German Documents*; Bernstorff, *My Three Years in America*; Crown Prince of Germany, *Memoirs*; Czernin, *In the World War*; Hindenburg, *Out of My Life*; Ludendorff, *My War Memories*, and *The General Staff and its Problems*; Crown Prince Rupprecht, *Mein Kriegstagebuch*; Tirpitz, *My Memoirs*. Where other works have been used they are cited.

monarch—and not the system and policy of the nation—that was endangered; neither the Allies nor the enemy anticipated that the end of Russia's war-effort was imminent. As for Roumania, though a great part of her territory had been occupied by the enemy, her army—like those of Belgium and Serbia—had simply stepped behind the sheltering wing of an ally, where it reorganised and continued to fight. As Hindenburg writes:<sup>2</sup>

It was a fateful thing for us (Germany) that throughout the whole war our High Command never succeeded in forcing even one of our smaller opponents, with the exception of Montenegro, to desert the ranks of our enemies.

By the Chantilly plan Generals Joffre and Haig and the representatives of Russia and Italy and of the smaller Allies had agreed that—in order to prevent the Central Powers from again taking the initiative—the Allies, employing their utmost force, should, if possible, launch their offensives as early as the first fortnight in February. The main stroke<sup>3</sup>—that of France and Great Britain—would again be delivered north and south of the Somme, this time on an immense front, the First, Third, Fourth, and Fifth British Armies attacking on a front of thirty-two miles between Vimy Ridge, north of Arras, and Le Transloy, and the Tenth, Sixth, Third, and First French Armies (forming the Northern Group of French Armies under General Foch) on a front of thirty miles between Péronne and the Oise. A fortnight later the French Fifth Army belonging to the Central Group (General Pétain) would attack west of Rheims with the object



<sup>2</sup> *Out of My Life*, p. 242.

<sup>3</sup> The several Powers concerned in each of the main theatres—Western, Italian, and Russian Fronts—were left to plan their own strokes, it being merely provided that these should be delivered with full strength and, as far as possible, simultaneously. On the Balkan Front attacks by Russian-Roumanian forces from the north, and by British, French, Serbian, and possibly Italian forces from Salonica, were to force Bulgaria out of the war. In "secondary" theatres the enemy was to be held, but Allied forces reduced to a minimum.

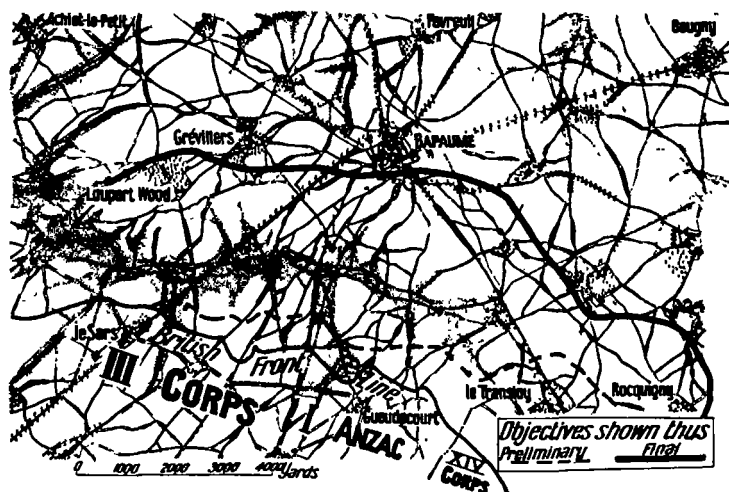
of profiting either by the breach created farther north or by the thinning of the German reserves. Later still, the British would take the offensive in Flanders and clear the enemy from the Belgian coast—a project urged by Haig at Chantilly in accordance with the expressed desire of the British Admiralty and War Committee, and to which he, as trustee of Great Britain's interests, attached great importance.

It was recognised that Russia and Italy might be unable to attack as early as February. But the French and British preparations on the old Somme battlefield were nearly complete; and, as the French commander and Government were acutely anxious to prevent the Germans from striking at France again, as at Verdun, it was decided to sacrifice simultaneity for the sake of delivering the earliest possible blow. In this year's offensive the British were intended to play the principal part.

Joffre issued his directives, and the preliminary movements of corps and armies on the French front began. The Sixth French Army from the British flank was sent back into training, Haig, who now had 55 divisions to the French 95, having agreed to take over the French line as far as Bouchavesnes, just north of the Somme. This relief, carried out early in December, caused a pause in operations in that sector, but otherwise the British and French on the Somme continued their "wearing-down" tactics with a view to straining the morale of the enemy whom in two months they intended to strike. At the end of November all corps of the Fourth British Army were warned that local attacks were required, in order to assist a larger operation which the French were about to undertake south of the Somme. The III Corps, astride the Bapaume road, was to seize the Butte of Warlencourt and "Hook Sap." It was at first held that the state of the ground farther south in front of the I Anzac and XIV Corps rendered such enterprises, for the moment, impossible, but later an operation was arranged on the left flank of the XIV Corps, the right of I Anzac being ordered to assist by attacking "Finch Trench."

On December 12th, while this attack was in prospect, General Rawlinson of the Fourth Army explained to his corps commanders the Chantilly scheme of a great February offensive, in which the Fourth Army's part was the capture

of the heights south of Bapaume as far as Rocquigny.<sup>4</sup> The corps staffs at once began to work out their plans; but, at



*Fourth Army's projected offensive.*

the end of the year, all this work was stopped by an intimation that the whole scheme had been changed; the Fourth Army would now take over an additional sector of the French line extending south of the Somme, and would play only a minor part in the offensive, which would be undertaken by the First, Third, and Fifth Armies.

The explanation of this sudden change was that, while the British staffs were elaborating their part in the Joffre-Haig plan, there were occurring in France events which entirely transformed the great effort of 1917. Since early in 1916 the star of Joffre had been burning less brightly. In order to increase his prestige in negotiations with the British Government, and to secure his support of Briand's Salonica projects, there had been given to him—as Commander-in-Chief of all the French Armies—power much greater than the French Government or parliamentary representatives could readily tolerate in the hands of a non-political leader. These

<sup>4</sup>The first advance, for which corps were to be ready by Feb. 1, would, on the Anzac front, be to the lower slopes of the Bapaume Ridge. The artillery would then have to be moved forward to cover the attack on the ridge, and corps commanders were asked to state the time required to prepare for this second stage.

powers he jealously guarded, warmly resenting criticism or interference. Nevertheless, there had been vigorous criticism as to the inadequacy of the Verdun defences,<sup>8</sup> and it had proved to be so well grounded that the Briand Government, though upholding the Commander-in-Chief, could not be uninfluenced. Other critics urged that Joffre was as rigid with his superiors as with his subordinates; that the plans which he brought to the conferences of the Allies had already been settled by him and the British Commander-in-Chief, and that the Allied Governments were merely allowed to endorse them. Neither the French people nor its Government had much enthusiasm for the strategy of the Somme: the promised break-through had not been achieved, and Joffre's efforts to prolong the battle in November until visible results had been gained had produced meagre fruit. On the other hand, at Verdun subordinate generals—profiting, of course, by the fact that German resistance was now concentrated on the Somme—had on October 24th attacked with swift and brilliant success, regaining Fort Douaumont and, some days later, Fort Vaux. Deputies streamed to the headquarters of the Second French Army, which had carried out this stroke, and found its commander, the hero of the hour, to possess a most attractive personality combining modest self-confidence with a peculiar power of bright and lucid expression. General Nivelle—so current stories ran—had not only interpreted with discretion his orders received from Pétain, but had allowed similar discretion to his subordinates, with the happiest results. His name was already whispered, not only in the lobbies of Parliament but in the corridors of Joffre's headquarters, as that of Joffre's possible successor.

This was the position when the French Government, to provide force for the prospective campaign of 1917, had to call up for service the "1918 class"—youngsters of only eighteen and nineteen years—a proceeding naturally accompanied by anguish to the nation. Briand was forced to explain to a secret session of the Chamber not only the immediate causes of this measure, but the whole situation. He now realized that the political attack upon Joffre was too

<sup>8</sup> In 1915 Lieutenant-Colonel Driant, commanding a sector at Verdun but also a deputy, was so impressed by the weakness of the rear defences at this vital point that on Dec. 1 of that year he laid the matter before the army commission of the French Chamber in Paris.

strong to resist. There had previously been available no other acceptable leader. Castelnau—largely on religious grounds—would be tolerated by neither radicals nor socialists; Pétain was sounded, but had the reputation of being too brusque with politicians. Moreover Briand was still determined that Joffre, though withdrawn to Paris, must retain chief command; otherwise his influence over the Allies, as well as in France, would be lost. But Pétain, though he would continue to serve loyally in his present position, would not accept the chief command subject to Joffre; their views as to the conduct of the war differed widely. Pétain held that a military leader must primarily regard the psychology of his troops: all projects must be tested by the criterion—what were they fit and ready to undertake? It was certain that he would favour the resting of his troops between great offensives, whereas Joffre believed in attempting to wear the enemy by constant nibbling attacks on narrow fronts. Pétain was therefore out of the question.

The rising of a new star, Nivelle, however, had completely altered the situation. His outlook was characteristic of French leadership: the rôle of a commander was to master circumstance; given confidence and ingenuity, almost anything could be achieved. Joffre favoured this attitude; indeed, on December 16th he signed a staff memorandum which was to become famous, setting forth the swift decisive method that was to be pursued in the forthcoming campaign. Nivelle, on his side, having so rapidly risen from lower rank, was unlikely to raise objection to Joffre's control. Briand therefore, before the secret session, urged Joffre to accept control, from a headquarters in Paris, over all the French Armies, while Nivelle took over the main French command on the Western Front. For a fortnight Joffre refused,<sup>6</sup> and before the Chamber Briand defended him, urging that only to a French leader possessing such personal ascendancy

<sup>6</sup> He protested that, as he was not charged with any military failure, he would hand over command only if dismissed—a step which, as likely to cause popular resentment, no French Government would readily adopt. At the beginning of December, however, he informed Nivelle that he intended to give him command of the Northern Group of Armies, which would undertake the French part in the Somme offensive. (Hanotaux, *Histoire Illustrée de la Guerre*, Vol. 15, p. 154.) Foch, who till then had commanded that group, had become tinged with the unpopularity attaching to the methods of the Somme battle. At this juncture he was reputed (by "rumours," says Mermeix, "of which the inexactitude was not always involuntary") to have broken down in health, and on that ground he was jettisoned by Joffre. (See Mermeix's *Joffre*, p. 240.)



would the allies of France entrust the supreme direction of their armies—an ideal universally desired by the French, but not yet achieved. He pointed out also that, only a few days previously, Joffre had obtained the agreement of the Allies to his plan for the spring; a change of the French command might necessitate the alteration of those plans. In spite of these well-founded arguments Briand was forced to promise Parliament that the command should be reorganised. He then put forward his scheme, and, on December 3rd, secured the consent of Joffre. But it was not for some days that, after an appeal to his patriotism, Nivelle concurred.

Thus in Paris on December 13th Joffre, Commander-in-Chief of the French Armies, became "technical adviser" to the Government "concerning the direction of the war," and Nivelle was made Commander-in-Chief of the Armies of the North and North-East. Briand had also reconstructed his Cabinet so as to form a small strong War Committee similar to the War Cabinet established the same week by Lloyd George. To the Ministry of War he brought in General Lyautey, who had saved the position of France in Morocco.<sup>7</sup> It was now realised, however, that Nivelle, holding his appointment from the French Government, was directly responsible to the Government and not to Joffre. With this subtraction Joffre's powers on the War Committee became indistinguishable from those of Lyautey. Lyautey could not be offered a mere sinecure. Moreover, the powers of Joffre were questioned in the Senate. Briand, to save his Government, promised that Nivelle should have a free hand, and that Lyautey—not Joffre—should be the channel through which the Government's instructions to him should issue. This reduced Joffre to a mere secretary, and on December 26th he resigned. To soften his fall, he was on the same day created Marshal of France.

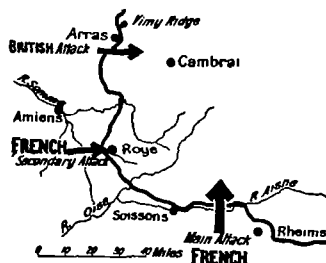
There was thus in unquestioned command at G.Q.G.<sup>8</sup> a comparatively junior leader<sup>9</sup> with a splendid record. At

<sup>7</sup> The other members of the committee were Admiral Lacaze (Marine), Ribot (Finance), Albert Thomas (Armament), Joffre, and himself.

<sup>8</sup> Grand Quartier General, the French "G.H.Q." For reasons of policy, Nivelle shifted it from Chantilly to Beauvais; shortly afterwards it was again moved to Compiègne.

<sup>9</sup> At the outbreak of war Nivelle, like Pétain, was a colonel. In 1915 he was given a division, and in 1916 a corps. When Pétain, commander of the Second Army, was given the Army Group, Nivelle succeeded to the command of the Second Army. Thus Pétain had been group or army commander for eighteen months, Nivelle for only six.

this very juncture, on December 16th, Nivelle had launched at Verdun a second brilliant counter-offensive in which the French had retaken most of the important positions till then remaining in German hands, and had captured 11,000 prisoners. Translated direct from that battlefield to the supreme command, Nivelle could hardly have avoided the conviction that in the tactical methods now employed at Verdun he and his assistants had at last discovered the means of "breaking-through." As Briand had anticipated, the new commander at once rejected the plans for the joint offensive with the British. Using the methods of his two counter-strokes, the French would now play the chief rôle. Instead of acting side by side with the British to rupture the western face of the great German salient, they would deliver the main blow, piercing its southern face while the British and the Northern Group of French Armies, launching two powerful subsidiary offensives, would hold the Germans along the western face. By throwing twenty-seven divisions—three armies—into the southern breach, Nivelle hoped in one swift stroke to destroy the principal mass of the German forces. Thus, the primary object of the British offensive would now be to draw away German reserves immediately prior to the main French blow. For this purpose Haig would be asked to strike on a narrower front than previously intended, no eastward thrust being made either by British or French from the old Somme battlefield. The British would be asked, instead of extending their attack to the Somme, to relieve south of that river not only the Sixth French Army, but the Tenth—thus taking over the French front as far as the Amiens-Roye road.<sup>19</sup> Without this relief Nivelle could not amass the twenty-seven divisions required for his grand attack.



Having resolved on so important a change of the agreed plan without consulting Haig, Nivelle had a difficult part to

<sup>19</sup> That is, to the neighbourhood of St. Quentin.

play in informing him. The British Commander-in-Chief was not in any way subordinate to the French. By Kitchener's instructions to Sir John French in 1914, the British leader was to endeavour "to coincide most sympathetically with the plans and wishes of our Ally," but he was nevertheless responsible to the British Government for the safety of the B.E.F., and would "in no case come in any sense under the orders of any Allied general." At a critical moment in the retreat from Mons, when there seemed danger of divergent action, the British Government had clearly shown its wish that Sir John French should conform to the intention of Joffre, and this indication doubtless influenced their subsequent relations. Haig's natural good sense had rendered his co-operation with Joffre almost perfect. It is true that the French would have preferred that Haig's command should be recognised as that of a group of armies—similar to those of Foch<sup>11</sup> (Armies of the North) and Pétain (Armies of the Centre); Foch himself, during the Battle of the Somme, would rather have conferred with Haig on a footing of formal equality. Nevertheless, by the typically British method of reliance solely on loyalty and good sense, expressed in courteous letters and interviews, a large measure of co-operation had been attained with a minimum of friction: Haig voluntarily fell in with Joffre's direction of the main policy and arranged with Foch most of the details.<sup>12</sup>

Briand and Joffre were aware that this was the only present means of securing for the French commander the control of Franco-British strategy. But the sudden appointment of Nivelle had changed all that. The British force on the Western Front was now approaching in numbers that of the French;<sup>13</sup> and Haig, who had been its Commander-in-Chief when Nivelle was still only commanding an army corps, and was at the end of 1916 to be given the rank of field-marshal, was a firm believer in the wearing-down methods and plan of Joffre.

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<sup>11</sup> Until December, when he was succeeded by Franchet d'Espérey.

<sup>12</sup> Rawlinson also conferred with Foch, and with the commander of the Sixth French Army. If Rawlinson had been entrusted, as was originally intended, with the direction of the Fourth and Reserve Armies, his position would have been more analogous to that of Foch.

<sup>13</sup> On Feb. 1 the French would (according to Gabriel Hanotaux, *Histoire Illustrée*, Vol. 15, p. 157) have 109 divisions (1,300,000 men), and the British 58 (over 1,000,000). The British force would still be rapidly increasing. These figures, though representing only the fighting divisions of infantry, furnish the soundest basis for comparison.

Haig, however, was capable of taking a broad view, and the changed scheme was by no means so contrary to his inclination as has sometimes been supposed. Like Joffre, he kept constantly in view the decisive stroke to which wearing-down tactics were only preparatory. Indeed, Nivelle's notion of a swift, powerful attack to break through and destroy a main part of the German Army was in complete accordance with the methods urged by Joffre in his letters of October and his staff memorandum of December 16th.<sup>14</sup> The fact that the French command was now ready to put even more vigour into the French effort than in 1916 was encouraging, and Nivelle's scheme contained certain attractive modifications of the old plan. His main thrust would converge towards Haig's instead of proceeding side by side with it—a change not without advantage, although the distance between the two most powerful thrusts might rob the manoeuvre of its full effect. Haig was too big to mind playing second fiddle to the French, if the general cause benefited thereby. Accordingly, when Nivelle immediately after appointment visited him at Cassel and explained his intentions, Haig at once agreed in principle to the changes. He mentioned to Nivelle the importance of later clearing the Belgian coast, which was part of the general scheme approved by Joffre. To Nivelle this project was barely worth a thought—the struggle would be decided before it came in question; but he was ready to approve of it as a step to be taken if his stroke failed or developed into a drawn-out battle.

Haig was well satisfied with this agreement, but with one detail of Nivelle's plan he would not agree, since it would render impossible the plan of later clearing the Belgian coast. For that project he required (as Joffre had agreed) at least twenty British divisions, and he could not provide these if he extended his line, as Nivelle desired, to St. Quentin. To this request, therefore, he demurred.

Nivelle, to whom his own great project meant everything, was deeply concerned at the prospect of its curtailment or delay. He did not find it easy to oppose Haig in a personal

<sup>14</sup> Mermeix, Gabriel Hanotaux, and General Mordacq treat the "Instruction" of Dec 16 as genuinely representing the intentions of Joffre. Winston Churchill, on the other hand, holds that, though drawn up while Joffre still ruled, it was intended "to greet the advent of the new chief." It is, of course, not impossible that the attitude of Joffre in the last weeks of his command may have been influenced by the current popularity of Nivelle's methods, but the French writers cited do not appear to entertain this suspicion.

interview, but on December 21st, on his return to G.Q.G., he sent him a full explanation of his plan, and repeated his request for the relief. At this point his letter, otherwise courteously worded and purporting to be only a statement of his "views," tended to become more abrupt:

This relief should take place without any delay, under risk of causing serious delay to the preparation of our approaching operation; I ask you therefore to carry it out on January 15th at latest.

He requested the earliest possible answer, and on December 25th Haig replied:

I agree in principle with your proposals and am desirous of doing all that I can to help you on the lines you suggest.

The only means which he could see, however, of relieving the French as far as St. Quentin was to obtain from England six additional divisions, and a definite answer must therefore wait until these could be assured to him.

This attitude, though Haig did not in the least realise it, was insupportable to a mind aflame with the belief that the Verdun methods gave the key to victory, and that impetuosity would break through where the dreadful slow pressure of the Somme had failed. Nivelle was not strong enough to make his radical differences of opinion clear to Haig; but he was pledging himself to his French supporters that there should be "no more Sommes." So far as his views were known to them, he had discarded all notion of turning the offensive into "wearing-down" operations if the attempt to break through failed—because it could not fail. "Our method has been tested—victory is certain." The battle would proceed in accordance with a most elaborate time-table, and success would be achieved in twenty-four or, at most, forty-eight hours. If it were not (he told a doubting Minister<sup>18</sup>), he would close down the offensive. Everything depended on the great stroke; yet here was Haig arguing that the British must save certain divisions for a later battle, and so forcing him to curtail the French reserves for his great project.

Haig, though welcoming the increased scope of Nivelle's effort, and determined to do his utmost to ensure its success, was far from a conviction that it would end the

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<sup>18</sup> See Ribot, *Letters to a Friend*, p. 174.

whole struggle. He was not sure that Nivelle had the means for accomplishing the great plan; he came to fear the evident lack of secrecy; and he himself tended strongly to the opinion that so powerful an enemy as the Germans would give way only if kept under tremendous pressure in the intervals between successive strokes. Though he appreciated the energy of Nivelle, he probably preferred the tactics of Joffre. He felt it necessary to keep in view the later operations, and the verdict of history will probably support his Scottish caution and refusal to swallow the whole plan proposed by his colleague. Although it appears true that Haig himself was not swift of thought or capable of devising—if indeed it was within human power to devise—that brilliant short cut to victory for which the nations in their agony continually longed, still—as events were to prove—Nivelle's plan gave no such short cut. Nivelle, however, finding the time for preparation all too short, could not long tolerate these delays. He appealed to the French Government for pressure upon the British Ministry to instruct Haig to conform.

The British Government had changed in December, Lloyd George replacing Asquith as leader of the Coalition. Whatever the intrigue which led to the displacement of the veteran English leader by his Welsh Minister for War, the change was welcomed by the army and nation. For the direction of its long, tense effort, the British Empire needed at this stage Celtic imagination, passion, and vitality, rather than Anglo-Saxon judgment and moderation. Towards the end of 1916 the huge, apparently futile, losses on the Somme had caused depression in England as well as in France. On November 13th, two days before the Chantilly conference, one of the Conservative leaders, Lord Lansdowne, in a famous circular, had asked his colleagues of the Asquith Ministry—"Can we afford to go on paying the same sort of price for the same sort of gains?" If not, he argued, was it not time to decide among themselves what terms of peace the Empire would accept as embodying its demand for "adequate reparation for the past and adequate security for the future"?<sup>16</sup> There were indications that the other leaders—for example, Balfour and even Churchill—while not as

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<sup>16</sup> The Prime Minister had declared that only on this basis could peace be accepted.

hesitant as Lansdowne, were deeply anxious as to the probable result of this apparently endless expenditure of life and money.

The wave of depression affected chiefly the intelligentsia, but Lloyd George, then Secretary of State for War,<sup>17</sup> had considered it most dangerous, and to be "very peremptorily stamped upon."<sup>18</sup> The new Prime Minister never ceased to believe that by intelligent methods the war could be won, and beyond question he furnished the British Empire with the leadership which it now required. But he had the utmost contempt for the strategy of the Somme;<sup>19</sup> Haig's cautious Scottish methods he found depressing in the extreme. The direction of British strategy in France, however, lay beyond his power, and though he despised Haig's leadership as clumsy, unimaginative, and even murderous, and would gladly have replaced him by a leader with natural powers more akin to his own, this step—lacking the support of the army and people—was out of the question.

The French Government's request, therefore, resulted in a conference, held on January 15th-16th in London, at which Nivelle explained his plan to the War Committee of the British Cabinet, and asked that the British should take over his line as far as St. Quentin. Haig, who was present, explained that this would necessitate the sending of six more divisions from England or curtailment of the British part in the offensive.

The British Prime Minister was already more disposed to adopt the French view than the British, and Nivelle, by the force and lucidity of his explanation, captured the English Ministers as completely as he had won the deputies who visited him at Verdun. His plan was accepted; Lloyd George, who had little confidence in Haig's schemes, decided that the line must be taken over as Nivelle desired, although, through fear of an invasion of Great Britain, only two fresh divisions could be promised to Haig. The battle must begin when Nivelle wished it, by April 1st, Haig's appeal that they should wait for the Russian and Italian attacks in May being

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<sup>17</sup> He had succeeded Lord Kitchener.

<sup>18</sup> *Soldiers and Statesmen*, by Sir William Robertson, Vol. I, p. 280.

<sup>19</sup> Lloyd George himself favoured at this period a proposal to cease attacking in France and to crush Austria by a combined offensive from the north-eastern corner of Italy.

set aside. Haig was instructed to carry out the agreement "both in the letter and in the spirit. . . . On no account must the French have to wait for us owing to our arrangements not being complete."

The six extra divisions<sup>20</sup> were eventually found for him, and there for the moment the matter rested; but, according to the French historian Mermeix, Lloyd George was so deeply impressed by Nivelle that on February 15th, without the knowledge of Haig or Robertson, he took the extreme step of informing one of the French attachés at the War Office<sup>21</sup> that, if necessary, the British Government would place the British Commander-in-Chief—and with him, of course, the British and dominion forces in France—under Nivelle's orders.<sup>22</sup> The sequel of this suggestion will be mentioned in its place.<sup>23</sup>

Nivelle's plan was thus endorsed. All parties anticipated that 1917 would bring a decision, but the British staff expected that heavy fighting would continue through spring and summer. For Britain's part guns and ammunition were now likely to be sufficient, but the Army Council was much exercised as to how long the full man-power of the B.E.F. could be maintained. It was therefore pressing for the tightening of regulations under which numerous "indispensables" of all classes, including large sections of workers, were exempted from conscription. Lloyd George, now that he bore the chief responsibility, was more sensitive as to the amount of pressure to which the working classes would submit, and G.H.Q. was forced to realise that its need for men would not be met until it had made an effort to "comb out" its own departments in order to send to the front fit men who were employed in offices at the rear. A rapid inspection by G.H.Q. is said to have shown<sup>24</sup> that between 100,000 and 200,000

<sup>20</sup> The 57th, 59th, and 66th, and the 5th Canadian from England, the 42nd from Egypt, and a Portuguese division. The 58th and 62nd had already been promised him; all the British divisions mentioned were Territorial.

<sup>21</sup> Major Bertier de Savigny.

<sup>22</sup> Mermeix, *Le Commandement Unique*, p. 141; *Soldiers and Statesmen*, by Sir William Robertson, Vol. II, pp. 208-9.

<sup>23</sup> See pp. 135-7.

<sup>24</sup> Colonel Repington's diary (*The First World War, 1914-18*), Vol. I, p. 487. The inspector was Lieut.-General H. M. Lawson.

**Man power—  
the  
6th Division**



men could be set free if women, unfit men, and additional labourers from Africa or Asia were imported to take their places. British labour battalions were already pouring into France for work on railways and roads for the coming offensive. Recruiting in China was extended. Companies of German prisoners were to be employed more generally; and a women's corps—the W.A.A.C.<sup>25</sup>—was forthwith raised for service at the bases and on lines of communication. It nevertheless became evident in February that no steps then taken could prevent the British Army from falling below strength in 1917, and the Government had to contemplate—though not yet to adopt—the measure already resorted to in Germany and France of reducing the infantry battalions in each division from twelve to nine.<sup>26</sup>

The A.I.F., consisting as it did almost entirely of front-line units, was at the moment little affected by the “comb out.” Unfit Australians were too highly paid to be retained for work at British bases, and therefore, except for a mere handful required at the A.I.F.'s English headquarters and training dépôts and a few dozen at its base dépôts and headquarters in France, all permanent “unfits” were marked for earliest possible return to Australia. On the other hand, the need to reach maximum strength this year caused the British Government on February 1st<sup>27</sup> to ask for the formation of a sixth Australian division. At the same time New Zealand was asked for “a division,” and Canada (which had four in the field, and a fifth expected in France in March<sup>28</sup>) for “divisions.” The telegram to Australia ran:—

The possibility of raising further troops is being anxiously considered by His Majesty's Government, and after passing in review man-power of this country steps are being taken to secure still more men for the army. Ministers may be interested to know that England, Scotland, and Wales to 2nd December had already each furnished to army over 17 per cent. of male population. His Majesty's Government are aware that last November your Government were doubtful whether under conditions then obtaining it would be possible to maintain five Australian divisions in the field. Nevertheless in view of the urgent need for men they ask your Ministers to consider earnestly once more possibility of forming at once a sixth Australian division. It is true

<sup>25</sup> Women's Army Auxiliary Corps. It was under military discipline.

<sup>26</sup> The pioneer battalions are not included. Germany, chiefly by cutting down all her infantry divisions to the standard of nine battalions (three regiments), had during 1916 formed over thirty new divisions.

<sup>27</sup> This was at the time when Haig was asking for extra divisions to enable him to take over the French line as requested by Nivelle.

<sup>28</sup> This division was not eventually sent as such.

that if this is done it will be several months before the new division could be formed and transported to Europe, but as it is by no means unlikely that the climax of the war will by that time be imminent, if indeed it has not been reached, the opinion of our military advisers is that it will be more to our advantage, after making due provision for the forces already in the field, to raise additional fighting units than to build up further reinforcements for an indefinite period. These additional units could at the worst be used as reinforcements.

Though we have not accurate figures, it appears on information available that there are still over 350,000 men in Australia fit for general service. Reinforcements for existing five divisions and mounted brigade (*sic*) in Egypt for 12 months amount to, say, 140,000, towards which a considerable number of convalescents who have once more become fit for general service should be available.

Even if your Government should not see their way to raising a sixth division complete in all respects, three additional infantry brigades, with or without a proportion of the normal complement of the other arms and services, would constitute a most valuable addition to the fighting strength of the Imperial Army on the Western Front. It is of vital importance that no time should be lost in forming whatever new units your Ministers may consider it possible to raise in order that they may reach this country during July at latest.

An early and favourable reply is hoped for by His Majesty's Government

This was followed on February 6th by a suggestion that, to save time, the division should be formed in England, General Birdwood making the arrangements as he had done for the 4th and 5th in Egypt, and beginning with the formation of one brigade. On February 8th Sir William Robertson reinforced the Government's request in a message to the Australian Prime Minister (W. M. Hughes):

Operations of the current year will be of supreme importance to ultimate issue of war . . . A sixth Australian division, with or without artillery, ready to take the field during July, would be invaluable addition to fighting strength. . . .

It will be seen that this request involved a direct reversal of the principle on which the Army Council had constantly refused offers of new formations, including that of a sixth Australian division<sup>29</sup>—that they should not be raised if this would interfere with the adequate reinforcement of existing divisions. As late as the autumn of 1916 the Army Council had threatened to break up the 3rd Division because reinforcements for the other four were running short.<sup>30</sup> The reason for the change of policy was obvious. The British staff now believed that the decisive struggle of the

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<sup>29</sup> In May, 1916; see Vol. III, p. 156

<sup>30</sup> See Vol. III, pp. 864-5, 866.



I. AUSTRALIAN TROOPS RETURNING ALONG A DUCKBOARD TRACK TO ONE OF THEIR CAMPS AT  
DELEVILLE WOOD, BEHIND THE SOMME FRONT, JANUARY, 1917

*First War Memorial Official Photo No. L138*

*To face p. 16*



2 AN INFANTRY BILLET AT FLESSELLES, WINTER OF 1910-1917

*Aust. War Memorial Official Photo No E27.*

*To face p 17.*

war was in sight, and any reinforcement held back beyond that time might be wasted. Russia not having then collapsed, the expectation of a decision was reasonable, and the change of policy probably justified. It was, however, to cause much embarrassment to the Australian Government, which on February 15th agreed that the 6th Division should be formed in England. The creation of a new Australian brigade, the 16th,<sup>81</sup> was accordingly at once begun, most of the men being those recovering from sickness or wounds. The Australian units in France were now, after the quiet months of winter, quickly regaining their full numerical strength, and even, in some cases, overflowing. It was thus possible for a certain number of officers and N.C.O's to be sent to the 6th Division from France, those being chosen who either needed rest or deserved promotion but had no other present chance of it.

With most of the vast material preparation in France for the coming offensive, the A.I.F. was only indirectly concerned. The reorganisation of the railways under Sir Eric Geddes<sup>82</sup> only slightly affected the Fourth Army, and the making of roads, provision of ammunition dépôts, and movement of heavy artillery were outside the function of the A.I.F.<sup>83</sup> Two important changes, however, had to be carried out in the Australian divisions. First, in order to set free part of the field artillery to concentrate wherever required for offensive action, irrespective of the movements of the divisions, the field artillery of the B.E.F. was at this juncture reorganised, infantry divisions being allowed only two field artillery brigades instead of four, and a large pool of unattached brigades, henceforth known as "army brigades," being formed for use by G.H.Q. wherever desired. At the same time all field-artillery batteries were to be increased from four to six guns. Thus the artillery of each division henceforth comprised two brigades with a total of 36 field-guns and 12 howitzers, while 44 army brigades (each of 18 field-guns and 6 howitzers) formed the pool. The increase in the size of batteries was carried out in the A.I.F., in general, by breaking

<sup>81</sup> The infantry consisted of the 61st Battalion (N.S.W.), Lieut.-Col. W. K. S. Mackenzie; 65th (Vic.), Lieut.-Col. D. S. Wanliss; 69th (Q'land and Tas.), Lieut.-Col. A. V. Deeble; 70th (S. Aust. and W. Aust.), Lieut.-Col. J. S. Denton. The 61st and 65th would be expanded later into a N.S.W. and a Victorian brigade respectively.

<sup>82</sup> Director-General of Transportation. His organisation also controlled the road and canal traffic in the area behind the British front.

<sup>83</sup> See Vols. II (pp. 395-8) and III (pp. 179-80).

up the most recently-formed brigades.<sup>84</sup> Of the older brigades the 3rd, 6th, and 12th now became army brigades, and were thenceforth used by G.H.Q. wherever required, though frequently with the Australian troops.

An important change was also made in the structure of all British and colonial infantry battalions, the specialists—bombers, scouts, Lewis gunners<sup>85</sup>—being no longer retained as separate bodies at battalion or company headquarters, but distributed evenly through the platoons. At the same time the form of attack was altered, the object being partly to “standardise” the processes, partly to ensure the whole attack escaping the enemy’s barrage, and partly to make each platoon so self-sufficient that it could fight down points of opposition as it went along. These reforms were based on the lessons of Nivelle’s operations at Verdun, British officers being deeply impressed with the new drill which the French infantry was now vehemently practising for the coming offensive.<sup>86</sup> The new British drill was not formally authorised until February 14th, when the Australian divisions, being all in the front line, had little opportunity to practise it. The first battle in which they were able to employ it effectively was Messines.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> An exception was made of two brigades of the 3rd Division, which had been formed in Australia and were therefore assumed to be of special interest to the Commonwealth authorities. With five howitzer batteries recently raised, the artillery of the A.I.F. sufficed to form two brigades for each division and three army brigades. The gradual expansion of the field artillery of the A.I.F. will be explained in an Appendix to *Vol. V*.

<sup>85</sup> Lewis guns were to be increased to sixteen—that is, four per company, except in pioneer battalions. Early in 1916 eight had been allotted to each Australian battalion; the authorised number had since been increased to twelve, but the increase had not immediately been possible.

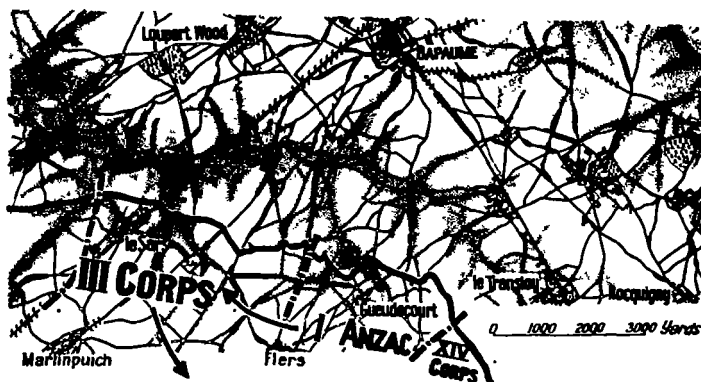
<sup>86</sup> Major R. H. Osborne (of Bangaroo, N.S.W.), an Australian officer in the British cavalry, who was sent down from 1 Anzac Headquarters to see the French exercising, said on his return: “They have us absolutely beaten cold—both in weapons and system of attack.” The French were practising with sixteen automatic rifles per company, which they were taught to fire from the hip as they advanced. Their rifle-grenades had a range of 180 yards, and the infantry were provided with light cannon, 2-inch “pom-poms.” Major Osborne reported that the dash of the French infantry was admirable; they were planning to advance eight kilometres a day.

<sup>87</sup> See *Chapter XI*. It was still more effectively put into practice in the Third Battle of Ypres (*Chapter XVII et seq.*).

## CHAPTER II

### THE WINTER ENDS. STORMY TRENCH

THE alteration of orders due to the abandonment of Joffre's plan and the adoption of Nivelle's reached the several corps of the Fourth British Army about January 2nd. For I Anzac they involved an entire change in the main operations. The Fourth Army, being now charged with a great extension of front and only a minor offensive, ordered its left corps, III, to hand over its trenches to its neighbour, I Anzac, and then



to relieve the French on the army's right. I Anzac could only hold the double line by putting in all its four divisions. The winter scheme by which two divisions of each corps held the line while the other two trained<sup>1</sup> was thus interrupted.

The projected offensive by the Fourth Army had been cancelled. But the extension of I Anzac's front brought the two northern divisions of the Corps into the region of the Fifth Army's intended stroke against the German salient north of the old Somme battlefield. The right flank of this attack would be buttressed by the Australians thrusting to Loupart

<sup>1</sup> The tours were about thirty days. The 5th Division alternated with the 2nd, and the 4th with the 1st. Thus the 5th Division held the line from Nov. 22 to Dec. 23, and the 2nd from Dec. 23 to Jan. 18. For the purpose of training, the corps established during this winter four separate schools—for infantry, artillery, signallers, and trench-mortar men. In addition, each division maintained a gas school, an infantry school, and, till Jan. 25, an artillery school. The function of the divisional infantry schools was, first, to train platoon commanders and their N.C.O.'s, and, second, to train instructors. At the corps school each course lasted a fortnight, during which time training was given in Lewis gunnery to 4 officers and 160 men; Stokes mortars, 2 officers and 40 men; bombing, 2 officers and 16 men; observation, 2 officers and 8 men.

Wood, a task which might well prove the most difficult ever undertaken by them. In order to bring these then imminent operations under a single command, the corps was transferred on February 15th from the Fourth to the Fifth Army.

Haig's intention of keeping the Germans on the Somme under strain during the winter had now been reinforced by a new motive—that of persuading the enemy that this would still be the region of the Allies' main thrust. It is true that the French attack projected there in December<sup>2</sup> did not take place, and that in December and part of January the mud rendered infantry operations hopeless in some sectors, including the I Anzac front.<sup>3</sup> But the artillery, now furnished with abundant ammunition, maintained incessant harassing bombardment and from time to time violently "attacked" trenches, roads, headquarters billets, and battery positions known to be used by the enemy. In pursuance of this stern policy, on Christmas day, at the hour when it was thought probable that the Germans would be sitting down to their

<sup>2</sup> See p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> The I Anzac Corps was then holding with two divisions a line of about two and three-quarter miles, bent round the ruins of Gueudecourt. The manner in which the line was held late in the winter and the nature of the activity are well recorded in the diary of Lieut. W. D. Joynt, 8th Battalion. During the relief of the 111 Corps (Jan. 26) his company moved up to take over from part of the Border Regiment a sector slightly east of "The Maze." Leaving huts at Bazentin-le-Petit at 3.30 p.m., they marched (by platoons in file) to the crest of the "Second-Line" Ridge near "High Wood," waited there till dusk, and then, in small parties of about ten in file, continued down the long slope visible to the enemy. The ground was covered with frozen snow, and the ice-coating on the duckboards made walking difficult. They found that the front line was held by a series of posts, fifty yards apart. Each post consisted of an N.C.O. and six men. Two platoons thus spaced out, with a Lewis gun on each flank, held the front line, a third platoon was in close support, and another in remoter support was sheltered in two deep dugouts. A third deep dugout was occupied by company headquarters and also by the company cooks. The coke of the cooks' braziers rendered the atmosphere of this dugout highly poisonous, but the arrangement enabled a hot meal to be sent at least once daily to the men in the posts. The only time when the posts could be visited was at night; the only approach was over the open under the eyes of the enemy posts about 280 yards farther on. Being placed by the company commander (Lieut. J. E. T. Catron) in charge of the line for eighteen hours, Joynt's duty was to move all night along the outpost-line. The night was bitterly cold—his breath froze on his muffler—but the position was rather tense and interesting by reason of the fact that the line was quite unprotected by wire (except for a single strand stretched to prevent men from walking by mistake to the enemy's line). The enemy could, therefore, have attacked at any moment without bombardment; yet it was the enemy garrison that appeared the more nervous, continually throwing flares. The policy of the Australian troops—as throughout their service, from the days of the Landing onwards—was to send up no light, but allow the enemy to illuminate No-Man's Land. At night each post had two sentries, one observing over the front of the post, the other keeping watch to its rear, and the men were not allowed to sleep; their officer, walking between the posts, would occasionally climb down out of the bitter wind and have a talk to them. By day only one sentry in each post observed, and the other men slept. The 8th (which, in spite of having absorbed large drafts of reinforcements, appeared to Joynt to be then soaring in spirits and morale) was perfectly confident that it could beat off any attack. The German snipers seemed quiet, but the British and Australian artillery never missed a chance of teasing and tormenting the enemy night and day with sudden bursts of fire; the German usually contented himself with firing some heavy shells each morning, and using his trench-mortars throughout the day.



midday feast, every gun of the Fourth and Fifth Armies fired two rounds at the points where the enemy's troops and staffs might be foregathering.<sup>4</sup> The fraternisation which had marked the Christmas of 1914, and to some extent that of 1915, was entirely absent in 1916. The commencement of the German new year—11 p.m., by British time, on December 31st—was marked by another bombardment.

On January 14th the wet weather which had prevailed since October gave way to bitter frosts, followed on the 17th by a heavy fall of snow, which lay frozen on the ground for exactly a month.<sup>5</sup> This entirely changed the conditions of the battlefield. Far from increasing the men's sufferings, the frost proved an immediate alleviation. The ground was dry, and trench-walls, frozen hard, ceased to fall in. Men could move and stamp their feet without creating a quagmire. The number of trench-feet cases in the Fourth Army, after an initial increase, fell away.<sup>6</sup> It is true that there were certain inconveniences—the only feasible method of entrenching was now to tunnel beneath the hard-frozen surface and then break open the top. Moreover, the figures of men at night showed up so plainly against the snow that patrols had eventually to be furnished with white overalls. Above all, as any mark of traffic now showed darkly in air-photographs, both sides

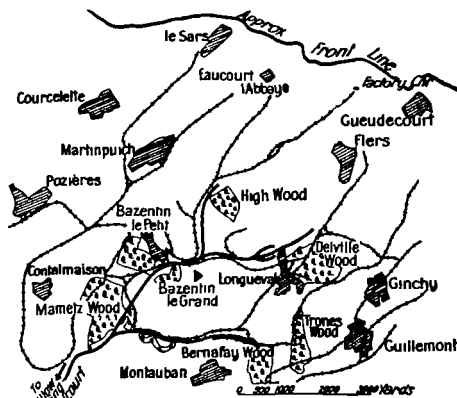
<sup>4</sup> While this ruthlessness was logical and consistent with the great plan of campaign, it was entirely contrary to the general feeling of the British troops, which was by no means opposed to "disgracing" Christmas by exhibitions of brotherliness and good humour. To many the thought of what the Christmas celebration meant made Haig's order for this bombardment strongly repugnant. "I don't know that I'm altogether in love with it myself," said General Legge to one who visited his headquarters before it was to commence. The histories of the 4th (Prussian) Guard Division and 5th Guard Grenadier Regiment do not record that the bombardment did any harm. But it was certainly one of those events which rendered fighting men sceptical and cynical concerning the tenets of that Christianity which both sides professed.

<sup>5</sup> See Vol. XII, plates 282, 286. The conditions at this time were described by Sergeant E. W. Simon, 15th Battalion, as follows: "Our rations came to Bull's Trench in bags of ten, per mules, and were carried thence by human mules. No water was brought, but the ice in the shell-holes was melted to obtain water. . . . An axe would soon be the means of filling the ditches with hunks of ice. One big shell-hole in Bull's Trench contained lovely clear water under . . . eight inches of ice. We used it for tea several days until one chap noticed a pair of boots sticking out . . . and discovered that they were attached to a body. . . . Many people here say it is the coldest winter they ever experienced. I filled my waterbottle at Mametz at midday with boiling hot tea, and when I reached Bull's Trench at 5 p.m. it was frozen. One would open a tin of fruit or meat to find ice inside, or see liquid, spilled on his coat, freeze in a minute. The bread came frozen so hard that an ordinary knife made hardly an impression on it, and we . . . broke it instead. Each man was supplied with two pair of gloves—one worsted pair, and 'trench' gloves lined with wool. . . . We generally managed to sleep warm by sleeping close together and sharing blankets—each man carried two. The cold, however, was far preferable to the mud. . . . We could move about. . . ."

<sup>6</sup> The Australian divisions were no longer especially prominent in the weekly lists of trench-feet cases. About this time a new treatment, practised by the French, was introduced in the Fourth Army, and the use of whale-oil temporarily abandoned.

ascertained which of their enemy's trenches were garrisoned, where his posts were placed, and by what tracks he reached them. The artillery thus checked its list of targets, and its harassing fire on both sides became noticeably more precise. This was more keenly felt by the Germans, since the British had more ammunition.

The troops gradually reacted to the brightness of the frosty days, the freshness of the air, the improved provision of duckboard walks, revetments, light railways, trench tramways, deep dugouts, and—behind the old Second-Line Ridge — hutted camps.<sup>7</sup> Meals were now brought to the front line, in food-containers, from kitchens not far in rear. That journey was no longer a nightmare struggle with the mud. The duckboard tracks lay on the long open slope, fully exposed to fire, but that risk



*Railway system in I Anzac sector, Feb., 1917.*

was far preferred to the old conditions. To avoid the most dangerous part of the slope in the left sector, a mile-long tunnel was begun,<sup>8</sup> but only 900 yards had been completed when, through taking over the III Corps sector, the I Anzac Corps had to divert its troops to other works and the scheme was abandoned. So different were the conditions from those of the autumn that on February 3rd Brigadier-General Elliott petitioned the commander of the 5th Division that his brigade, the 15th (Victoria), might be allowed to prolong its stay in

<sup>7</sup> For the initial scheme of these various works, see Vol. III, pp. 922-5.

<sup>8</sup> The tunnel was suggested by Colonel Nicholson of the 1st Pioneer Battalion as an approach to the left sector (held alternately by the 1st and 4th Divisions). It was to take a Decauville tramway and foot passengers from the valley in advance of Delville Wood to a point beyond the north-eastern corner of Flers, slightly over a mile. Work continued from the end of November until Jan. 9. The plan was to sink twenty shafts so as to work on a large number of "faces" simultaneously. Birdwood suggested that a similar tunnel might be cut in the right sector (5th and 2nd Divisions) also, if a similar series of shafts could have been put down in that area. This, however, was impracticable. "Nicholson's Tunnel" was driven as far as "Gap Trench," and was eventually used for underground cables. Had the original plans for the spring offensive been adhered to, it would probably have been completed.

the line in order to complete its scheme of works. All the battalion commanders, he wrote, desired this. The men were healthy, the shelling not severe.

If you can see your way to allowing the brigade to remain continuously in the line until it asks to be relieved, which will be done immediately the men appear to be suffering in health or getting stale, I feel convinced you will benefit by having in this part of the line at least a condition of things which you may with pride bring corps or army representatives to view.<sup>9</sup>

His men spoke of this action as a most inconvenient crank of "the old Brig," but it is significant that he retained their full affection.

Beyond question, the troops of the I Anzac Corps in this cold weather recovered their elasticity, faster, perhaps, than either they or their officers realised at the time. For units in rest the excellent provision of Christmas fare by the Comforts Fund, organised recreations, and even the occasional snowballing and sliding on the frozen ponds, the detaching of men to schools, the re-establishment of officers' messes in the battalion camps—all these had their effect. The morale of the troops was also improved by a sympathetic quality in Birdwood's administration. It gradually became known, for example, that in certain instances in which several brothers had enlisted and only one survived, he had allowed the survivor to return to the parents or family.

The winter also saw extensive changes in the commands of the A.I.F. This was due to several causes. First, it was now recognised that it should in no way be counted against a commander if, after a year or two's service under incessant pressure, his mental energy showed signs of flagging. Accordingly the practice was instituted of sending even highly valued leaders to England for a period of service at the A.I.F. training dépôt, after which they were re-employed in high positions in France.<sup>10</sup> Second, certain officers after prolonged trial were held to lack, or to have lost, some quality essential for command at the front. This was believed to be

<sup>9</sup> This brigade established a permanent works party of 50 men from each of its battalions, under Major H. G. L. Cameron. They camped at the "Miller's Son" dugout, close behind the front-line system. Placing his kitchens in this dugout, Elliott endeavoured to provide his men with *three* hot meals daily.

<sup>10</sup> For example, Brig.-General Sinclair-MacLagan, who had commanded the 3rd Brigade since the Landing, was sent for a rest to Salisbury Plain. He was succeeded in the 3rd Brigade on Dec. 3 by Lieut.-Col. H. Gordon Bennett—the young Australian who had guided the 2nd Brigade in the Second Battle of Krithia. Bennett held this command until the end of the war.

the case with Generals Legge of the 2nd Division and M'Cay of the 5th. In such cases it was dangerously easy for the commander of the A.I.F. to take advantage of the ill-health to which almost every middle-aged man was subject at some time during this winter, and to relieve a leader purely on that ground. That method, however, could not fail to have awkward consequences when medical boards in England pronounced these officers fit to resume their duties at the front. By February there had accumulated in London a number of Australian generals who had been thus discarded, but who were possessed of considerable influence and not at all prepared to accept the situation without protest. On the recommendation of Brigadier-General Anderson (then Commandant, Administrative Headquarters, A.I.F.)—and against that of General Birdwood—M'Cay was chosen by the Australian Government to replace Sir Newton Moore as G.O.C. of the dépôts near Salisbury.<sup>11</sup> White had to be sent over to England to intimate frankly the decisions which it would have been better for General Birdwood to have explained openly before they left France.<sup>12</sup>

A third cause of change in command was pressure from the Australian Government, which in a cablegram reiterated its wish that, where possible, A.I.F. commands should be given to Australians. Birdwood, though naturally reluctant to part with leaders who had served the A.I.F. particularly well, was prepared to uphold the Australian policy. Thus General Cox, the veteran Anglo-Indian who had splendidly commanded the 4th Division, was in January appointed military secretary to the India Office with the rank of lieutenant-general, Brigadier-General William Holmes, of the 5th Brigade, succeeding him in command of the 4th Division. As M'Cay and Legge left their divisions on the 18th and 28th respectively, leaders had to be found within a fortnight for three Australian divisions. The 2nd was allotted to Brigadier-General Smyth, the quiet,

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<sup>11</sup> Birdwood had a high opinion of M'Cay's capacity for training, and would from the first have been willing to give him general command of the A.I.F. in England. He recognized, however, that Anderson would not have agreed.

<sup>12</sup> The difficulty was increased by the fact that not infrequently Birdwood, being anxious to soften the fall of officers thus dispensed with, gave them letters—no doubt intended for use in Australia—stating that there was nothing against their conduct, and that their command had been completely satisfactory. This may have been true in the sense that no definite failure could be charged against them, but it was hardly fair to the Commonwealth Government, which, on their return, was thus led to entrust them with high responsibilities for which some were quite unsuited. When confidence in a senior officer was lost, the best course would have been frankly to displace him.



3. THE FROSTS OF JANUARY, 1917

Men standing on the lake at Hénencourt Chateau (I Anzac Headquarters), watching their comrades sliding on the ice

*Anzac War Memorial Official Photo No E178*

*To face p 24.*



4. THE FROSTS OF JANUARY, 1917  
At the water point, Bernaiay Wood.

*Aust. War Memorial Official Photo No EZ123*

*To face p 25.*

cool Anglo-Egyptian who had commanded the 1st Brigade since before Lone Pine.<sup>13</sup> The 5th Division would possibly have gone to Gellibrand of the 6th Brigade had he not then been in hospital at Amiens. As it was, it fell to Brigadier-General Hobbs, who from the beginning of the war had commanded the 1st Division's artillery. During part of the winter Hobbs had acted temporarily on Birdwood's staff as artillery commander. Both Birdwood and White had been impressed by his knowledge and capacity. This acquaintance had also removed an impression that he was weak, probably due to his slightness of bodily frame and his hesitation in speech. His success with the staff of the 5th Division<sup>14</sup> was instantaneous; he secured the affection which had been denied to M'Cay, and capably led the division until raised to command of the corps shortly after the Armistice.

It remains to describe the minor attacks carried out during the late winter on the I Anzac front in order to keep the enemy under strain. On January 10th General Rawlinson of the Fourth Army asked the corps to adopt a more offensive attitude.

#### **Minor operations**

The German 4th Ersatz Division, which faced it, was considered a poor one. Birdwood suggested a number of small operations in those sectors in which No-Man's Land was not too wide and some German salient tempted attack. Accordingly, on January 31st, I Anzac, which had now extended its left over the old III Corps front, was allotted the following tasks:

(1) To capture a German salient ("Cloudy Trench") on rising ground north-east of Gueudecourt.

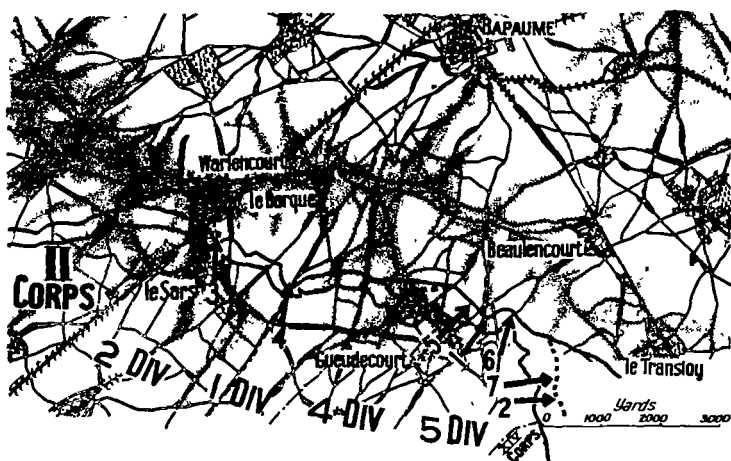
(2) To capture the southern part of "Finch Trench," west of Le Transloy. (The 29th Division, attacking with two battalions, had on January 27th captured "Landwehr" and "Landsturm" Trenches immediately south of this point, taking 370 prisoners.)

(3) To capture the Butte of Warlencourt. (This had been raided in the small hours of January 30th by the 15th Scottish Division; 17 prisoners of the 1st Guard Reserve Regiment were taken, and dugouts destroyed.)<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Smyth was temporarily succeeded in the 1st Brigade by Colonel Blamey (later commander of the 2nd Battalion, and G.S.O. 1 of the 1st Division). On Jan. 27, Brig.-General Lesslie, the officer of Birdwood's staff whose work on Anzac Beach is mentioned in *Vols. I and II* of this history, was appointed to the command. In the 5th Brigade Holmes was succeeded by Colonel R. Smith from the 22nd Battalion (6th Brigade).

<sup>14</sup> It had just been reinforced by an able A.A. & Q.M.G., Colonel J. H. Bruche, newly arrived from Australia.

<sup>15</sup> Two companies of the 8/10th Gordon Highlanders carried out the attack dressed in white overalls. Their division was then temporarily under the command of I Anzac pending relief by the 2nd Australian Division.



*The numbered arrows indicate the projected operations.*

(4) To capture "The Maze"—the complicated little salient near Euclercourt-l'Abbaye unsuccessfully attacked by the 2nd Australian Division on November 5th and 14th.<sup>16</sup>

(5) To capture "Stormy Trench," north of Cloudy Trench (which would have been seized by Operation No. 1). This attack must be prepared by March 1st.

To these were added, on February 5th:

(6) To capture "Sunray Trench" (east of Cloudy Trench).

(7) To capture the northern part of Finch Trench (*see No. 2 above*).

From February 3rd all the divisions of the corps were in the line, each arranging its own reliefs. The operations on Cloudy and Stormy Trenches would fall to the 4th Division; the capture of the Butte to the 2nd; that of The Maze to the 1st; that of Finch and Sunray Trenches to the 5th.

General Holmes, on taking the 4th Division into the line in the second week of January, readily agreed with the suggestion for the capture of Stormy Trench—a name which in these operations was applied to Cloudy Trench also. As a brigade commander he had reconnoitred this salient. It lay only 100 yards in front of the junction of the 4th and 5th Divisions, on a neck of one of the shallow spurs leading to the valley before Bapaume. Beyond it was a depression into which the Australians could not see. It was therefore a position of some advantage, but too close to be bombarded with safety.

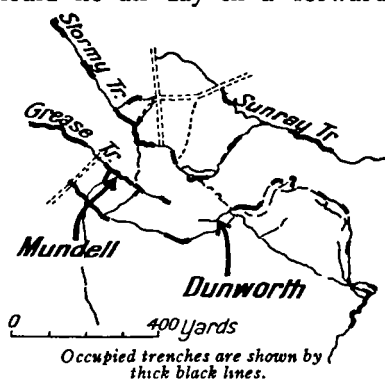
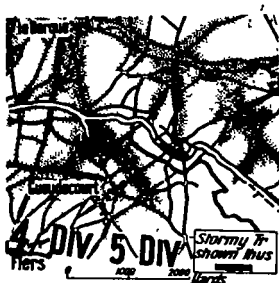
<sup>16</sup> See Vol. III, pp. 911-5, 928-35.



Holmes at first thought of a "silent raid," to be made at dawn on January 17th. General Smyth,<sup>17</sup> however, pointed out that in front of the salient lay a certain amount of wire, which must be cut by trench-mortars, whose emplacements, like many other works in the neighbourhood, were waterlogged. Holmes's trench-mortars could not begin their work till the weather changed. As 400 yards of trench were to be seized, Smyth recommended that the assault should be made by one battalion under a barrage.

The frost entirely changed the conditions. By January 30th the 2-inch mortars of X4A Battery had been emplaced, and the 15th Battalion (Queensland and Tasmania) had been ordered to make the attack at 7 p.m. on February 1st, after a two-minutes barrage. There would be a half-moon, setting about 2 a.m., and the object of the barrage was to keep down the Germans while the attacking parties emerged to cross No-Man's Land. The assembly would be difficult, the Australian front trench ("Grease" and "Shine" Trenches) not being continuous. It was accordingly arranged that the right wing for the attack, half-a-company (3 officers and 70 others) under Captain Dunworth, should lie all day in a forward trench<sup>18</sup> which could not be safely approached by day. The left wing, a company (3 officers and 150 others) under Major Mundell,<sup>19</sup> could reach its assembly position (Grease Trench) unseen at dusk.

Patrols of the 5th Division had reported the entanglement protecting the point and eastern side of the salient to be three feet



<sup>17</sup> Smyth's division, the 2nd, held the right divisional sector till the middle of January, when it was relieved by the 5th.

<sup>18</sup> This was dug by the neighbouring 15th Brigade.

<sup>19</sup> Major W. T. Mundell, 15th Bn. Commission agent; of Moonee Ponds, Vic.; b. South Melbourne, 17 Nov. 1889. Died of wounds, 19 Aug., 1917.

high and fifteen deep, consisting of three rows of "barrel-rolled" wire. On January 30th when, under cover of a field-artillery "shoot," the trench-mortars attempted for an hour to cut it, the officer-in-charge<sup>20</sup> reported the attempt a failure, many of the "plum-pudding" bombs bouncing off the frozen ground and bursting in the air, and some falling dangerously short. Next day the attempt was repeated, but the ammunition appeared to have been affected by the weather, and the seventeenth round fell just outside the emplacement of the mortar and burst, killing or wounding the crew.<sup>21</sup> As parts of the wire were still uncut, heavy artillery was turned on it next day, by request of Brigadier-General Brand.

At 6.58 p.m., an hour after dusk, the eighteen-pounders fired a few rounds at a more distant trench to warm their barrels, and at 7 the barrage came down on Cloudy Trench, the artillery of the divisions to right and left bombarding other points to divert the enemy's attention. It so happened that the 12th Brigade of the 4th Division's field artillery had just been taken out of the line for reorganisation as an "army" brigade, and the artillery covering the attack was thus not over-strong. The 15th Battalion was, however, reported at this stage to be well pleased with the barrage, and the main party under Major Mundell, leaving its trench and advancing thirty yards while the guns still fired on the German trench, rushed the western part of the position as they lifted, and, as usual when the advance was so swift, took the enemy entirely by surprise, capturing most of the garrison—including two company commanders—in their dugouts. The troops on the right, under Dunworth, found themselves faced by uncut wire. They lay down, threw bombs into the trench, and eventually retired, carrying their wounded. Dunworth, however, had an hour previously reported the state of the wire, and Colonel McSharry<sup>22</sup> had accordingly ordered one of the right platoons to join the left party.<sup>23</sup> This platoon, under

<sup>20</sup> Lieut. W. H. McPherson, M.C.; 4th Div. Artillery. Overseer; of Hyde Park, S. Aust.; b. Walkerville, S. Aust., 8 Dec., 1888.

<sup>21</sup> The ammunition had been stored at the front by the 1st Division Bombardier J. C. Smart was killed, and Gunners M. Collins and J. Lamb wounded, the latter mortally. (Smart belonged to Sydney and Dubbo, N.S.W.; Collins, who was killed in action on 27 Sept., 1918, to Terowie, S. Aust.; and Lamb to Dollar, Vic.)

<sup>22</sup> The same who had been adjutant at Quinn's Post when the Turks mined it; see Vol. II, p. 201, 210 *et seq.*

<sup>23</sup> The right party thereafter comprised fifteen men under Capt. Dunworth, and fifteen under Lieut. T. B. Heffer (of Mosman, N.S.W.).

Lieutenant Domeney,<sup>24</sup> on entering the trench bombed towards the right, seized part of the right party's objective, blocked the trench, and held the flank.<sup>25</sup> Major Mundell's party had already secured and barricaded the left.

The trench had been easily captured, its garrison showing such poor spirit as to arouse some contempt among their captors. Three deep dugouts—in one of which Mundell placed his headquarters—were found, and many small shelters, and large quantities of bombs.<sup>26</sup> Chiefly by means of this supply the Queenslanders, after a long fight, beat down a bombing counter-attack on their left, and the trench was consolidated. Several Lewis gunners were sent out in advance, but, partly through danger from the shells of their own side, were afterwards withdrawn. Mundell sent back for bombs every man he could spare, and a third company of the 15th and forty men of the 14th assisted with the carriage of ammunition and food. The German barrage, which at 7.15 fell on No-Man's Land and about the old front line, was severe, and continued so, causing heavy casualties among these parties. At 1.55 the Germans again counter-attacked, and Mundell fired the S.O.S. signal—at that time, a rifle-grenade emitting two red and two green lights. The artillery reopened at once, and the attack was beaten off. McSharry had just received a message from Mundell saying that the position was safely held, and asking for a box of cigarettes, when, at 4.4 a.m., the S.O.S. signal was again sent up. It was repeated at intervals, but not until 4.50, when it was sent up from battalion headquarters, did the artillery observe it.<sup>27</sup> The barrage then fell, but, according to Mundell's infantry, neither then nor at any other time did it appear heavy enough to prevent a well-organised counter-attack. The combined artillery of the 4th and 5th Divisions during this fight fired

<sup>24</sup> Capt W. L. E. Domeney, M.C.; 15th Bn. Telegraph linesman; of Flowerpot, Tas; b. Hobart, 18 Jan., 1893.

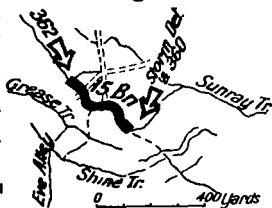
<sup>25</sup> They did not, however, get as far as was originally intended. A party of the 58th (two sergeants and forty men under Lieut. R. H. Hooper) had begun a trench to connect the 15th Brigade's left flank with the right of the 15th Battalion's objective. As the latter was not seized, the work had to be stopped.

<sup>26</sup> Seven cases of stick-bombs and 200 egg-bombs were found. On the left a communication trench led to the German rear. It was explored by Lieut. W. Murdoch (of Irvinebank, Q'land), and proved to contain many dugouts. He eventually came up against Germans, who with bombs stopped his progress.

<sup>27</sup> 4.4 a.m. is the time given by Col. McSharry. He says that the signal was repeated at 4.15 and 4.20. The 4th Brigade diary says 4.30, and that of the 4th Div. Artillery 4.40. The report of the artillery commander says 4.50 and 4.53. Whatever the reason for these discrepancies, the cause of the first signal being unanswered was apparently the defective nature of the S.O.S. device, some of the coloured lights failing to burn.

only 8,600 shells, little more than would be used in a trench-raid. Undoubtedly the batteries were for some reason anxious about their ammunition supply.<sup>28</sup> Unfortunately, also, both the Stokes guns supporting the attacking troops were destroyed by German shells, and the officer-in-charge of them, Lieutenant Robin,<sup>29</sup> was killed.

Before the artillery opened, the infantry had been driven out of the trench which it had held all night. What had happened there was briefly as follows. In the small hours, the moon having sunk and thick darkness set in, the German artillery began to bombard the right of the captured position. A few minutes after 4—about the time when the morning telegram went from corps to army reporting the trench safely held—the weary Queenslanders observed a number of men moving along the enemy's support trench (part of Sunray Trench) towards the right. The S.O.S. signal was fired without response. The slight artillery-fire which, in answer to Mundell's requests, had been maintained on the German avenues of approach was insufficient to stop the advance. The enemy swung round, came up the depression, and fiercely bombed the Australian right. Rifles were useless, and the German barrage, now very severe and coming from three sides, rendered the bomb-supply precarious. Nevertheless bombs were hurried to the right, and the German egg- and stick-bombs found in the trench were used up. The right gave way, and, with the Germans now bombing both that flank and the centre, the Queenslanders were forced back, some of them still fighting, across No-Man's Land.<sup>30</sup> The Vickers and Lewis guns had first been safely withdrawn, but a remnant of the troops was caught still fighting in the trench and captured.<sup>31</sup>



<sup>28</sup> Early in the night, on receiving a report of bombing on the left, the supporting batteries, which had previously eased down, quickened for a time their rate of fire. But at 4.25 a.m., when Col. McSharry rang up the artillery and asked why it was not firing, he was told that it had received no special call and that there must be a limit to the expenditure. It was subsequently stated that after this fight some of the guns were within six rounds of the end of their supply.

<sup>29</sup> Lieut. J. K. Robin, M.C.; 4th L.T.M. Bty. Bank clerk; of Kensington, S. Aust.; b. St. Peters, S. Aust., 21 Oct., 1887. Killed in action, 2 Feb., 1917.

<sup>30</sup> Upon the falling back of the right, a party under Sergt. E. W. Simon continued to resist when a bomb burst in its midst. A private, "Paddy" Lennan (of Tamworth, N.S.W.), struck down and lying wounded on the bottom of the trench, continued to urge the men: "Here are some bombs in this bag! Stand and fight like men! Never mind me." He was captured, and died ten days later.

<sup>31</sup> With them was Lieut. W. Murdoch, who had been wounded in the head.

The 15th Battalion lost in this action 144 officers and men, of whom 42 were missing. General Holmes held that the reverse was due to the Lewis guns not having been maintained in advance of the captured trench. The retirement of the right party also gave rise to a general impression that the operation had been half-hearted. The German account, however, made available since the war, entirely refutes this theory and confirms the infantry's statements as to the weakness of the barrage.

The report of the Guard Reserve Corps, after accurately describing the attack, says that an immediate counter-attack by elements of the 362nd I.R. was beaten off by the Australians with Lewis gun fire. A second attempt to counter-attack was also baulked by their watchfulness. Finally, the artilleries of the 4th Guard and 4th Ersatz Divisions were concentrated upon the salient; the 362nd I.R. was ordered to counter-attack from the west, and the 360th, with a detachment of "storm troops,"<sup>32</sup> from the east. The Australian artillery barrage was not sufficient to prevent the counter-attack from getting through.<sup>33</sup> The Australians' position, the report says, was now very critical; they had run out of bombs, their signal flares were wet, their machine-guns had been put out of action, their runners could not get alive through the barrage. The artillery of both sides (so the captured Australians said) was falling on their trench. A further supply of bombs came, but there was no hope of holding the position. The 362nd pressed in from the west, but the storm troops in their first onslaught suffered heavy loss,<sup>34</sup> and they continued to meet with stiff resistance. Eventually, after silencing two machine-guns with bombs, they began to make good headway, inflicting many casualties. The Australians, driven into a short length of trench, attempted to flee across the open No-Man's Land, and were cut down by machine-guns. The Germans claim to have captured an officer and 25 men. They themselves lost 163, of whom 2 officers and 42 men were missing. The losses of the two sides were thus about equal.

Three nights later the 5th Australian Division was to undertake, on the extreme right of the Anzac front, task No. 2 on the list already given, the capture of "Finch" and "Orion" Trenches. The 4th Brigade arranged to repeat the attempt upon Stormy Trench at the same date and hour—10 p.m. on February 4th. The task was given to the 13th Battalion (New South Wales). Notice was short,<sup>35</sup> but pains were taken to avoid the mistakes previously made. The

<sup>32</sup> Troops specially trained and reserved for the purpose of making assaults. They were usually a divisional organisation.

<sup>33</sup> This is implied in the German account of the fighting on Feb. 4 (see p. 37).

<sup>34</sup> A German captured on a later date said that the "storm" detachment of the 362nd attacked, but failed in its first attempt through lack of support.

<sup>35</sup> Colonel Durrant of the 13th did not hear of the intended operation until 8 p.m. on Feb. 3. At a conference of his company commanders two hours later, he explained the plan. A second conference was held on the afternoon of Feb. 4.

attack was to be delivered this time by four companies of the 13th, with one of the 14th in support,<sup>36</sup> and advantage was taken of an impending relief of an artillery brigade<sup>37</sup> to have both the outcoming and incoming brigades in position, thereby much increasing the number of guns for covering the new attempt. Moreover, to meet the chief danger—the inevitable German counter-attack—no less than 12,000 bombs were carried forward to the “jumping-off” position (Grease Trench) and another 8,000 were stored at battalion headquarters (the “Chalk Pit”) close behind the line. Every one of the thirty-six bombers of each company carried twenty bombs or more, and every company was also followed by twenty carriers, each with twenty-four bombs. Moreover, the rest of the infantry, wearing greatcoats against the bitter cold, carried in the pockets more bombs than usual. Thus in the company led by Captain Murray (of Pozières fame),<sup>38</sup> each rifleman carried six grenades, the whole company taking 2,040. As the enemy was reported to have outranged the 15th by using egg-bombs, there were provided 1,000 rifle-grenades, which would far outrange egg-bombs. The troops were carefully tutored. All company commanders, junior officers, and N.C.O.’s reconnoitred No-Man’s Land, Murray with some of his scouts crawling all over it and examining the enemy’s wire. To avoid noise during assembly, the men’s feet were muffled with sandbags, and, to keep the Lewis guns from freezing, the gunners smeared the parts with kerosene. The plans for the artillery, except as to its strength, were much the same as before. The troops were in magnificent spirit. Eight of the 13th, who were due for their London leave on February 3rd, insisted on staying to take part; and Lieutenant Kell,<sup>39</sup> ill with dysentery, left his bed in order to enter the fight with Murray’s company.

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<sup>36</sup> Col. Durrant was given permission to pick any company of the 4th Brigade to support him. He chose Captain Hansen’s of the 14th. The satisfaction of this company was extreme; its men spent hours cleaning and oiling their rifles, attending to their bombs, and otherwise ensuring that they should deserve the honour—which they did. Unfortunately the gallant Hansen, a church worker before the war, and one who throughout the war controlled his men by his acts rather than by his words, was mortally wounded in the action.

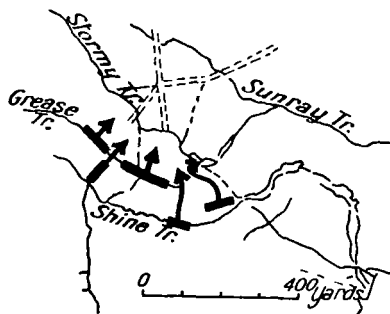
<sup>37</sup> The 6th (Army) A.F.A. Brigade was relieving the 10th A.F.A. Brigade.

<sup>38</sup> See the account of the 13th Battalion’s attacks on Mouquet Farm, *Vol. III*, pp. 763, 766-9, 831-2, 835.

<sup>39</sup> Capt. R. H. Kell, 13th Bn. Bank clerk; of Hunter’s Hill and Merriwa, N.S.W.; b. North Sydney, 7 Aug., 1892.

The attack projected by the 5th Division that night fell through, its objective<sup>40</sup> having been abandoned by the Germans after the 29th Division's successful operation on January 27th. There was, however, no lack of operations to divert the enemy's attention. The same morning, on the left of I Anzac, the Royal Naval Division (II Corps) attacked "Puisieux" and "River" Trenches and captured most of its objective. That night, when the 13th Battalion attacked, the artillery of the 1st Australian Division feinted an assault upon The Maze, and the 2nd and 18th British Divisions (II Corps) raided the enemy opposed to them.

At dusk the portions of the two companies of the 13th holding the front of attack were reinforced by their remaining platoons. Each then closed in to its left and the other two companies came up into the intervals, and lay silently waiting for "zero" hour. Owing to the bitterness of the night, this was one of the occasions on which a rum "issue" was—with entire justification—made to troops about to attack, the jars being passed quietly along the line as it lay in the snow.<sup>41</sup> All four companies were to advance in a single wave, the Lewis gunners and bomb carriers following on the heels of this line. The assembly was again difficult by reason of the front trench not being continuous; on the right a platoon of Murray's company had to start from Shine Trench, 100 yards farther back than the rest. Moreover, the moon was full, and in places men had to be trickled into the front trench in twos and threes to avoid giving warning of the operation. Thus on the left Lieutenant Bone's<sup>42</sup> company was not all through when, at 9.58, the barrage fell. He led the rest straight out, and caught up the advancing line; the platoon from Shine Trench, hurrying forward, also managed to take up its proper



<sup>40</sup> Finch Trench. Its abandonment was discovered by patrols of the 14th Brigade on Feb. 2.

<sup>41</sup> One company, however, lost half its supply through the rum-jar breaking.

<sup>42</sup> Capt. W. S. Bone, M.C.; 13th Bn. Accountant; of Longueville, N.S.W.; b. Aramoho, N.Z., 3 June, 1888.

alignment. The men of Hansen's company of the 14th, moving into the front line as the 13th left it, were deeply impressed by the spectacle of the dark well-ordered line, grimly advancing across the snow.

In No-Man's Land the going was easy and the troops had to be held back. They ran upon an advanced enemy machine-gun post, and killed or wounded the crew. Another machine-gun far ahead began to chatter, but was silenced by the barrage when it lifted. The next instant the left and centre of the advancing line leapt into the trench,<sup>43</sup> whose garrison was just beginning to run up the stairs of its three deep dugouts. The greater part of the objective was thus seized without difficulty<sup>44</sup> and a barricade erected on the left.

On the right, however, Captain Murray, scanning the enemy's wire as he advanced, had been unable to discern any gap, but he had expected this difficulty and therefore led his men to the left round the broken end of the entanglement. By the time they reached the point of the salient—a maze of used and disused trenches—the men of the local German post were tumbling out of the mouth of a dugout and gallantly hurling themselves straight into the fight. They employed bcmbbs only, and two sections of the 13th's bombers who were to lead on this flank, together with other Australians, bombing from both the parapet and the trench, fought them down. Then, with a covering party to hold off Germans, who were still throwing an occasional bomb, they blocked the main trench with duckboards, sandbags, and clods of frozen earth. This barrier was more than a hundred yards short of the point

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<sup>43</sup> The experience of the troops on this occasion, following very closely on the barrage, was vividly described by Private S. E. Stephens (of Double Bay, N.S.W., afterwards killed at Bullecourt). The barrage was to lie for two minutes on the German front line, and the troops had been told by their officers that, after one minute, they must get out and cross No-Man's Land so as to reach the German entanglement just as the guns lengthened. The barrage had for one minute been swishing and banging low and close when "someone said, 'Now!' There was a bustle, and I found myself in No-Man's Land jostling someone to get around a shell-hole. . . . We in the centre were a bit behind—everything could be seen as clear as day. . . . We crouched in our advance, moving slowly, picking our way, with the shells shrieking over us and bursting only a few yards in front of us. I thought about the 'backwash.' Why weren't some of us killed? Would they knock our heads off if we stood up straight. . . . I felt amused at the struggles of a chap that was sitting down, softly cursing a piece of barbed-wire—such silly meaningless curses.

"The wire! We were up to it already. But the shells weren't finished. They had made a good mess of it, I saw as I stepped through from loop to loop. A piece caught me somewhere, and I was free again. No, the shells weren't finished yet. They are bursting behind me. . . . I caught the flash of another out of the tail of my eye, and then there was a straight line of intermittent flashes in front. What's this? At that moment I slid and scrambled down a steep bank and found myself in the German trench."

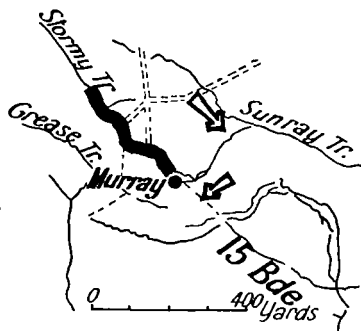
<sup>44</sup> Capt. N. Macdonald (of Geelong, Vic.), however, was sniped when about to fire a signal showing that the trench had been gained.



intended, but Murray thought it unwise at the moment to thrust out into the maze of old saps that lay beyond. Within twenty minutes the work was completed.

The operation had thus far met with swift success. Sixty-six Germans had been taken; the identification of the enemy unit—the 10th company of the 362nd Regiment—was known at G.H.Q. within an hour of the assault. But the German barrage, as before, was swift, accurate, and heavy. It fell with great force behind the left, and bomb-carriers, stretcher-bearers, German prisoners, and especially the 14th Battalion in the “jumping-off” trench, suffered heavy loss. This continued throughout the night, the bomb-carrying parties nevertheless crossing No-Man’s Land again and again—some men accomplishing six or even seven journeys.<sup>45</sup>

On the right, Murray’s barrier had hardly been finished when some twenty figures were seen moving through No-Man’s Land towards his right rear. A party of the 58th (15th Brigade) under Lieutenant Hooper was to dig from the flank of the 15th Brigade to join him, and it was at first thought that this might be the party. At the same time, however, Germans were seen streaming south-eastwards along their support trench. Standing by one of his Lewis guns, Murray was directing the gunner’s fire upon these when a shower of twenty grenades bursting almost together shattered the bombers at the right barricade. The



*Direction of movement shown by white arrows.*

neighbouring troops recoiled along the trench. The S.O.S. signal was at once fired,<sup>46</sup> the artillery of the 4th and 5th Divisions opened immediately, and Murray flung himself into the most famous fight of his life. He was a leader whose presence always raised other men to heights of valour and

<sup>45</sup> L/Cpl J Rankin (of Sydney) was wounded on his seventh trip, L/Cpl F. W. McQueen (of Petersham, N.S.W.; died of wounds on 27 Sept., 1917) and his party of Murray's company made six, McQueen carrying the loads of some of his men who were killed.

<sup>46</sup> This was at 10.47. Murray had specially charged one of his officers, Lieut. Harper, with the duty of sending up the S.O.S. signal, when necessary. In case he were hit, three N.C.O.'s were warned for the same duty.

energy. A survivor of the bombers, Private Robertson,<sup>47</sup> shouting "bombers wanted," seized upon five riflemen and directed their bombing. The Germans, being much more numerous, were bombing more heavily, and Robertson was wounded in the face, but, by firing rifle-grenades beyond the Germans, he laid a barrage between them and their supplies, and held on till Murray obtained twenty more bombers from the left. The Germans—including those mistaken for the 58th—had now ensconced themselves in two old trenches that ran across Murray's, just out of range of Mills grenades. The Australians, led on the right by a lance-corporal<sup>48</sup> and on the left without a leader, at once charged and put them to flight.

The fight now lulled, but a report of the counter-attack led Colonel Durrant to arrange<sup>49</sup> for a barrage to be laid on the depression beyond Stormy Trench, and for a gun to be kept firing in enfilade down the German front trench just beyond Murray's right. Murray himself, recognising that the maze of old saps on his flank might shelter the next enemy counter-attack, spent part of the night exploring them with Robertson. His company was too weak, through casualties, to occupy them, but when next the Germans counter-attacked, Murray's men knew where to throw.

On the left the fighting was less severe, but the German artillery appeared to have the precise range.<sup>50</sup> From midnight bombing was only intermittent until 3 o'clock, when Murray's troops again saw movement in Sunray Trench. At 3.7 the S.O.S. signal was fired, and the descending barrage broke up the counter-attack. On the right some German reinforcements may have approached, for bombing increased, but any force that had gathered was beaten off with rifle-grenades. In the dangerous time before dawn—5 to 6.30—the Australian artillery kept up precautionary fire, but no counter-attack came, and daylight found the position solidly held. A communication trench had been dug through to it, but was too

<sup>47</sup> Cpl. M. D. Robertson, D.C.M. (No. 2435; 13th Bn.). Station manager; of Rowena, N.S.W.; b. Bungendore, N.S.W., 6 Dec., 1882.

<sup>48</sup> R. B. Withers, who was wounded in the knee as he climbed out, but continued to lead. (Capt. R. B. Withers, D.C.M.; 13th Bn. Ship's officer; of Leichhardt, N.S.W.; b. Haymarket, Sydney, 19 Oct., 1893.)

<sup>49</sup> With Lieut.-Col. W. C. N. Waite (of Kensington Park, S. Aust.), who commanded the group of artillery in immediate support, and who shared Durrant's headquarters.

<sup>50</sup> It alternated with 5.9-inch high-explosive bursting in or about the trench, and 4.1-inch "universal" shell burst overhead.

shallow for daylight use. On the right, Murray's flank was far short of the point intended to be reached, and the 58th could not dig through to it.<sup>51</sup>

A counter-attack was expected on February 5th, a wireless message having been intercepted—"point of breaking through is to be attacked under trench-mortar fire." At 7.45 p.m. the enemy's grenade-throwers<sup>52</sup> became active, but no assault was attempted. At 8 o'clock Murray's company, now numbering only 48 out of 140 who had attacked, was relieved by Captain Ahrens' company of the 16th: when told of the need, the whole of the 16th Battalion had volunteered for this duty. The enemy did not again counter-attack.<sup>53</sup> On the contrary, his artillery was next day observed to be registering his own front line, now Sunray Trench.<sup>54</sup> Obviously he anticipated a further thrust into his line.

The operation had cost the Australians about 350 casualties.<sup>55</sup> Its success was largely due to Murray's magnificent leadership on the right,<sup>56</sup> but largely also to the thorough measures to remedy any observed defects in the arrangements for the first attack. In the second the field artillery more than doubled its previous expenditure of shells.<sup>57</sup>

The German account states that this time the Australians attacked with a sufficient barrage; their success was greater and they inflicted heavier casualties. An immediate counter-attack failed, and so did one prepared later: the *sturmtruppen* could not get through the barrage and machine-gun fire. A third counter-attack was then prepared and attempted before dawn, with the same result. The success of the attacker had been complete; he had won a trench, taken prisoners, and lost nothing which afforded the Germans any information about himself. The total German loss was about 250, of which the missing comprised 100.<sup>58</sup> A decision taken on February 5 to recapture the position by carefully prepared counter-attack was later abandoned as

<sup>51</sup> Lieut. Hooper, though wounded, had gallantly made the attempt with his party.

<sup>52</sup> Small instruments for firing "pineapple" bombs (so called from the shape of their segmented case).

<sup>53</sup> On the night of the 6th some movement was mistaken for a counter-attack. The S.O.S. signal was fired and a barrage laid down. The next morning and evening the captured trench was registered and bombarded by German trench-mortars, and shortly before midnight, on infantry movement being seen, the S.O.S. was again sent up. The protective barrage fell within thirty seconds. But apparently no attack had been intended. Probably the Germans were merely sent to barricade their trench.

<sup>54</sup> Its garrison had been temporarily withdrawn to safety.

<sup>55</sup> The 13th Battalion lost 7 officers and 226 men. The casualties in Capt. Hansen's company of the 14th were exceedingly heavy—95 out of 120. Hansen was killed. In recognition of the work performed by the 14th, the communication trench eventually cut through was called "Fourteenth Avenue."

<sup>56</sup> This was recognised by the award of the Victoria Cross.

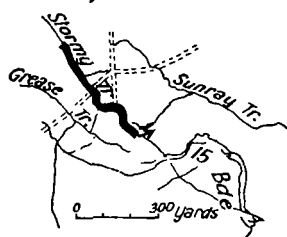
<sup>57</sup> It fired about 20,000 as against 8,600 for Feb. 1-2.

<sup>58</sup> The I and II/362 lost 4 officers and 38 others; the III/362 lost in all 204.

likely to lead only to more expenditure of life and ammunition. The loss of Stormy Trench did not endanger any other German position, and the commander of the Guard Reserve Corps therefore obtained leave of the army commander to barricade the trench and let things remain as they were.

The 4th Brigade intended to thrust to the right so as to render possible the completion of "Hooper's Sap,"<sup>59</sup> but this had not been done when it was relieved by the 12th Brigade. The task was accordingly undertaken by the 46th (Victoria) Battalion at midnight on February 11th. Covered

by a shower of rifle-grenades<sup>60</sup> to keep off the German supports, a detachment under Lieutenant Syme<sup>61</sup> and Captain Clark<sup>62</sup> seized the enemy barricade on the right. The Germans (9th company of the 362nd I.R.) fought well, but 150 yards of trench were gained, and a double barricade erected. Shortly before dawn the Germans rushed the fore-



46th Battalion's attack shown by arrow.

most barrier, but it was quickly retaken.<sup>63</sup> As the flank still fell too short, the 46th three days later chose the occasion of a raid by the 15th Brigade<sup>64</sup> to capture by the same method as before another twenty-five yards of trench. The attacking party, under Lieutenant Syme, suffered only slight loss,<sup>65</sup> but the German barrage evoked by the neighbouring raid fell on the Stormy Trench area, causing twenty-seven casualties in the 46th Battalion. As even then the flank was not far enough to the east, the attack was, by arrangement, continued next night by a party of the 57th Battalion (15th Brigade) under Lieutenant Forrest.<sup>66</sup> With twelve

<sup>59</sup> See p. 35.

<sup>60</sup> Sixty were to be fired from six rifles within two minutes.

<sup>61</sup> Capt. W. A. Syme, M.C.; 46th Bn. Farmer; of Clear Creek, Wangaratta, Vic.; b. Stawell, Vic., 8 Oct., 1889. Died, 16 March, 1921.

<sup>62</sup> Capt. G. H. Clark, 46th Bn. Of Middle Park, Vic.; b. Adelaide, 15 Mar., 1893.

<sup>63</sup> The German loss was 5 killed; the Australian, 2 killed and 4 wounded.

<sup>64</sup> On Feb. 14 three officers and 120 men of the 57th Battalion under Capt. J. B. Laing (of Kew, Vic.) raided Sunray Trench a few hundred yards to the east. The raid was preceded by a hurricane bombardment by eight Stokes mortars, which fired 208 rounds in a minute and a half. Twenty-three prisoners were taken, but a number of these tried to escape and were shot.

<sup>65</sup> Several volunteers, among them Private W.B.W.B.D. Castles (of Mystic Park, Vic.), who headed the bombing, lost their lives.

<sup>66</sup> Lieut. C. G. Forrest, M.C.; 57th Bn. Clerk; of Leith, Scotland, b. Leith, 6 May, 1892. Died, 22 Feb., 1920.

bombers wearing body armour (which is said to have proved useful<sup>67</sup>) he seized another seventy-five yards and held on until Hooper's Sap had been cut through.

The small wearing-down operations on the Somme were now in full swing. On February 17th the II British Corps followed up its success of the 4th by attacking with two divisions the flank of the great German salient. Although a few hours previously some deserters had warned the enemy of the coming assault, and the Germans were able to make preparations and to inflict heavy loss, the British secured about half their objectives and 350 prisoners. The enemy's resistance was proving remarkably weak, and his infantry was surrendering freely, especially when sheltering in deep front-line dugouts.<sup>68</sup> Some of the Stormy Trench prisoners indeed stated that they and their comrades had made a compact not to leave their dugout, and that, when ordered upstairs to meet the attack, they had left their rifles below. They added that men were increasingly playing truant from their battalions in the back area, and the authorities dared not punish them with severity.

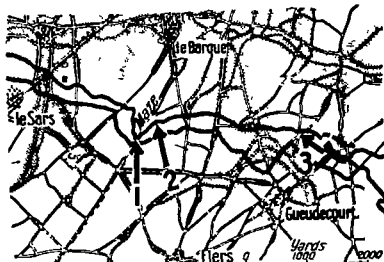
Whether or not all this was true, the morale of some German divisions was certainly at least weakening. The two Prussian Guard divisions facing the left of I Anzac were, however, found to be remarkably stout. Raids of the 1st Australian Division on February 10th against "Bayonet Trench" and the point of The Maze were repulsed by strong wire-entanglements and stubborn defence.<sup>69</sup> As a result the

<sup>67</sup> The current opinion, however, was that, though lighter than the German, this armour was too cumbersome for use in heavy bomb fighting.

<sup>68</sup> Immediately after being called to the Western Front, in the conference at Cambrai on 7 Sept., 1916, which acquainted him with conditions on the Somme, Ludendorff received the impression that "the deep dugouts and cellars often became fatal mantraps. . . . The Field-Marshal and I could for the moment only ask that the front lines should be held more lightly, the deep underground works be destroyed. Concrete 'pill-boxes' (on the surface), which, however, unfortunately took long to build, had acquired an increasing value." Yet a German officer, captured in a deep dugout at Stormy Trench, said that his commander insisted on his men adding several "frames" (wooden supports) to each dugout every day. The captured officer himself was strongly against his senior's policy.

<sup>69</sup> At the Maze, the raiders (4th Battalion) approached the objective by the old trench leading up to its point. The Germans (the 9th and 11th companies of the 5th Prussian Foot Guard Regiment) lined their trench and threw bombs. An attempt was made to cut the wire, and Lieutenant V. V. Brown and one man succeeded in crossing it and reaching the parapet. It appeared hopeless, however, to persist, and the raid commander, Lieutenant G. R. McKeown (of Wellington, N.S.W.), accordingly recalled the party. It lost 6 men wounded. Bayonet Trench was raided by 4 officers and 103 men of the 5th Battalion in the sector captured by Captain J. D. Elder of the 27th on 5 November, 1916 (see Vol. III, pp. 913-4). The raid issued near the protrusion in the Australian line known as "Yarra Bend." The party was held up by three rows of wire; after two had been crossed, the raiders were met with bombs, but on the right Lieutenant F. Langford (of Williamstown, Vic.) with 15 men entered the trench. Only two Germans, however, were found, and these were shot down, but the Victorians had to leave hurriedly,

capture of The Maze, which was to have been almost immediately undertaken, was postponed to February 22nd, in order to allow of the trenches and wire being bombarded by trench-mortars, including the "heavies." Meanwhile the foothold in Stormy Trench was, on February 19th, to be extended—this time in a westerly direction.



1 & 2. raids of 4th and 5th Bns. (1st Div.), Feb. 10. 3: projected attack by 45th Bn. (4th Div.), Feb. 19.

But on the 16th the long frost had ended. Next day the last traces of snow were disappearing; rain was falling. A divisional diary notes for the next few days:

Feb. 17. Slight rain and mist. Poor visibility.

Feb. 18. Foggy and slightly colder.

Feb. 19. Heavy rain during early morning. Dull for remainder of the day. Slight fog.

Feb. 20. Light steady rain since early morning.

Feb. 21. Warmer, but visibility bad.

Feb. 22. Thick fog with light rain.

On the night of the 19th the troops of the 45th (New South Wales) Battalion destined for the bombing attack at midnight up Stormy Trench became so bogged in the communication trenches and reached the front so fatigued that, on a message sent at 9.31 by Major Howden,<sup>70</sup> both the attack and the artillery bombardment were countermanded just in time. In such conditions, the bomb-supply could not have been maintained.<sup>71</sup> After more preparation, however, 300 yards of trench were seized in a bombing attack about dawn on February 21st, rifle-grenadiers and a Stokes mortar battery,

for the 10th company of the 5th Foot Guard counter-attacking found 13 rifles and 250 bombs left in the trench (*History of 5th Guard Regt.*, p. 314). In returning across No-Man's Land the party was caught in the German barrage, and lost 3 officers and 46 men (including 4 who became lost, and were captured by the Germans two days later). At Yarra Bend on February 6 an N.C.O. and 6 men of the 5th Foot Guard tried, "after heavy bombardment," to enter the Australian trench, advancing in white overalls. The leader was mortally wounded and captured, and the raid failed.

<sup>70</sup> Major H. C. Howden, M.C.; 48 Bn. Commercial traveller; of Northcote, Vic.; b. Preston, Vic., 1890. Died of wounds, 5 July, 1917. (*See Vol. II*, p. 220.)

<sup>71</sup> Major J. E. Lee, sent forward by Brig.-Gen. J. C. Robertson, found Fourteenth Avenue "worse than any trench he had ever seen." He had once to be pulled out of the mud.



5. A BRITISH INTELLIGENCE OFFICER ADDRESSING GERMAN CAPTURED AT "STORMY TRENCH"  
*First War Memorial Official Photo No E186*

*To face p 40*



6. THE BUTTE OF WARLENCOURT AND THE QUARRY (SEEN FROM THE NORTH-WEST, LOOKING  
ACROSS THE BAPAUMI ROAD, LE SARRS)

*First War Memorial Official Photo No. E432  
Taken in March 1917*



instead of the artillery, supplying the barrage.<sup>72</sup> Resistance was slight, and twenty-three prisoners were taken, but the Germans hit back later with an hour's artillery bombardment which caused some loss.<sup>73</sup> The operation was continued by the 45th on the night of February 22nd,<sup>74</sup> another great length of trench being captured and thirty-two prisoners taken with hardly a casualty to the bombers.<sup>75</sup> Bayonet Trench near "Fritz's Folly," not far to the north-west, had lately been abandoned by the enemy,<sup>76</sup> and the 4th Division intended to link the newly-won position with its new posts in that neighbourhood.

To staff officers' batmen and car drivers, French *estamine* proprietors, and other observant and well-informed persons behind the Somme front, it was at this time obvious that the launching of a great British offensive farther north was approaching. Along the roads leading to the First and Third Armies there lumbered daily battery after battery of siege artillery withdrawn from the Fourth and Fifth Armies' front. From six groups—twenty-three batteries—the heavy artillery of I Anzac had by February 15th fallen to two groups—seven batteries. The Fifth Army had indeed all too little artillery, field and heavy, for the task that still fell to it—that of striking deeply north-eastward so as to draw the enemy's reserves from the Arras front. As Gough pointed out to G.H.Q., his artillery would be particularly weak on its right flank, where the I Anzac Corps must attack.<sup>77</sup> The first preliminary of Gough's plan had already been undertaken on February 17th by the II Corps,<sup>78</sup> and within the next month the I Anzac Corps was to make ready for the leap by seizing

<sup>72</sup> The rifle-grenades fell 60 yards, and the Stokes mortar bombs 300 yards, beyond the bombing party. The latter consisted of two bombing sections of the 45th under Lieuts. E. W. Cornish (of Sydney) and R. A. M. Murray (of Sydney and Wentworth Falls, N.S.W.).

<sup>73</sup> There were 17 casualties in the 45th Bn., Lieut. W. T. Meggitt (of Summer Hill, N.S.W.) being killed and Lieut. Cornish wounded. The total German loss was probably about 40.

<sup>74</sup> Two bombing sections again attacked, this time under Lieut. L. D. Ferguson (of Sydney).

<sup>75</sup> Again, however, the German barrage caused casualties—about 25 among the Australians and a number also among the prisoners.

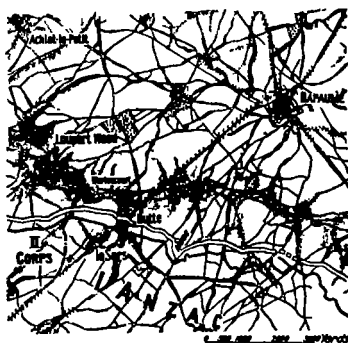
<sup>76</sup> This was a result of the enemy's withdrawal to his "winter line" (see p. 127). Patrols of the 47th Bn. had on February 10th found Bayonet Trench empty, and on the night of the 15th that battalion had stationed a line of posts across the base of the old German salient. In front of these posts the Germans were found strongly holding "Pork Trench"—a continuation of Stormy Trench.

<sup>77</sup> G.H.Q. answered that he must limit his plans according to the power of his artillery—it could not be increased.

<sup>78</sup> See p. 39

The Maze, "Gird Trench," and the Butte of Warlencourt. Pys would next be seized by the II Corps. Finally, just before the great stroke of the First and Third Armies at Vimy and Arras, the I Anzac and II Corps would draw off the German reserves by a violent thrust to Achiet-le-Petit and Loupart Wood.<sup>79</sup>

If the I Anzac Corps was not to be too stale for this effort, an immediate rest for the troops seemed urgent. It was the only corps which, when emerging from the struggle against the winter, had been called upon to put all its divisions into the line and hold twice the normal length of front. It was now occupying practically the same front as the German Guard Reserve Corps, which it was to attack, hardly a safe condition for success in that offensive. All its men knew that a great offensive was imminent, and that they would be used as offensive troops—they vaguely expected "another battle like Pozières and then the end of the war." They were prepared to act as storm troops, but it seemed that they were required both to hold the line almost continuously and also to



<sup>79</sup> Haig was anxious that the I Anzac Corps should take part in order to make Gough's blow more formidable. The operation, however, would probably have been one of extreme difficulty, since very powerful concentrations of German artillery would be on and behind the Fifth Army's right flank (formed by the I Anzac Corps). Gough's artillery commander, Major-General Noel Birch, pointed out that the Fifth Army would be subject to fire from known gun-positions three times as numerous as those threatening the Third Army. It may therefore perhaps have been fortunate for the Australians that the projected battle never occurred. It might truly have been "worse than Pozières."

attack. This grievance, expressed by some of them on leave in London, was strongly represented to General White<sup>80</sup> by the High Commissioner and Keith Murdoch. Birdwood considered it wise to inform Gough, and suggested that, if the whole corps could not be rested, at least its front might be shortened. Both Gough and G.H.Q. agreed as to the need for at least training the troops in the new system of attack, but could only endorse a decision already taken by Birdwood—to withdraw one division, and hold the line more lightly with the other three.<sup>81</sup> Accordingly, on February 22nd Birdwood ordered the withdrawal of the 4th Division from the line<sup>82</sup> round Gueudecourt; the 1st and 5th Divisions were to replace it by extending their inner flanks.

In spite of the local activity at Stormy Trench<sup>83</sup> and on the II Corps front, the I Anzac line had of late been especially quiet. It was noted that the enemy was using his trench-mortars more, but his artillery less.

The front was absolutely dead to-day (says a diary of February 10). Not a German shell along the whole snow landscape from Switch Trench. One Australian gunner said—"We've forgotten there's a war on here."<sup>84</sup>

With the thaw, this comparative tranquillity became much more pronounced, artillery observers being unable to see their targets.<sup>85</sup> The attack on The Maze was again postponed for a week; the relief of the 4th Division was to be carried out by the morning of the 24th.

That afternoon came reports from V Corps that, on its front, the Germans had abandoned their forward trenches. The I Anzac and II Corps were forthwith ordered to probe. From the discoveries then made and the reports of prisoners taken, the British staff was led to suspect that a momentous change had occurred in the enemy's plans. What was happening might be nothing less than the first stage of a voluntary abandonment by the Germans of their great salient between Arras and the Aisne.

<sup>80</sup> He was then visiting London (*see p. 24*).

<sup>81</sup> The Chief of the General Staff (General Kiggell) minuted Birdwood's letter, forwarded by Gough: "C. in C. agrees that the first step is the withdrawal of one (and later two) divisions from the line."

<sup>82</sup> Its artillery, however, was to remain with the 1st and 5th Divisions.

<sup>83</sup> The stirring up of the German artillery had doubled the daily rate of Australian casualties in that area.

<sup>84</sup> There had, however, been a sharp bombardment by the British on Feb. 8.

<sup>85</sup> So foggy were the nights that, on Feb. 17, when the 12th Brigade was being relieved, a Lewis gun opened upon a party of the infantry which had lost its way and wounded seven.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE GERMAN PLAN, 1917, AND ITS IMMEDIATE RESULT

THIS discovery—although the fact was naturally unknown at the time—was due to a revolution in the enemy's war plans. It was indeed known that, in the previous December, there had existed in Germany and Austria, as in Great Britain and France, some depression after the immense strain of 1916. It was obvious that there, too, question had arisen—probably serious question in some quarters—whether complete victory could be gained, and, if not, whether it would not be best to forgo the notion of it, at any rate in the present struggle, and seek at once the best terms that could be arranged with the Allies. That this view was held by the new Emperor of Austria<sup>1</sup> was constantly avowed by his brothers-in-law, the Princes Sixte and Xavier of Bourbon, who had actually joined the Belgian Army.

On December 12th the German Government had addressed to President Woodrow Wilson an appeal for peace. Its form was not such as to assure the Allies that it would mean the sloughing of German militarism—the aim for which the great mass of the Allied soldiers, certainly the British, were fighting<sup>2</sup> and, as will be told later, it was unanimously rejected. It is even now doubtful how far it was sincerely made in the belief that the Allies would accept it, or how far it was a political manœuvre intended to put Germany in the right with neutrals, especially with America, and to weaken the Allies by affording food for pacifist agitation. At various times since early 1915 the German press had contained suggestions of the possibility of peace. But it must be remembered that the Germans at the beginning of the struggle had obtained the advantages commonly secured by the aggressor who, to use a sporting metaphor, gets his blow in

<sup>1</sup> The old Emperor Franz Josef had died on Nov. 21. The new Empress, Zita, daughter of the Duke of Parma, leaned strongly towards the Entente.

<sup>2</sup> See pp. 50-1.

first. By a foul blow through Belgium, in flat violation of law and honour, Germany had seized stakes exceedingly valuable, if only for purposes of negotiation, namely, eight provinces of northern France, and the whole of Belgium except a few square miles. The Central Powers had since overrun Serbia, Montenegro, and a great part of Roumania. The position then was that, at the worst, even if hope of winning the war by action on land or sea disappeared, Germany might hold what she had seized. Her armies might still make the recapture of those regions impossible, or at least too costly in blood and wealth. Her position might, therefore, be compared with that of a burglar who, having secured part of his booty and holding it fast as security, offers, when pursuit presses, to come to terms with those whom he has robbed.

This was felt with intense bitterness by the Allies, whose blood was being poured out in the struggle. But naturally the feeling was not so deep or so general in America. From the beginning of the stalemate which had continued ever since the Battle of the Marne, the American President had felt that his duty to his country and to the world lay in restoring peace at the earliest moment at which this could be done—with one proviso, that the peace must be a lasting one. For this reason, while unfavourable to a peace involving humiliating or obviously unjust terms (which he felt would ensure only the certainty of future wars), he privately made known through the visits of Colonel House to the British, French, and German Governments that he was prepared to mediate the moment any of them were willing to accept a fair offer of peace. He even indicated that America would be prepared to support a fair offer by throwing her weight against the side which rejected it. House outlined to the French and British Governments the terms America would consider to be fair: the surrender by Germany or her allies of Belgium, Alsace, Lorraine, Serbia, and other occupied countries, and the adjustment of the Eastern frontier, Germany being meanwhile compensated outside Europe for any sacrifices required of her in the East. A League of Nations<sup>a</sup> was also to be established for the avoidance of future war.

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<sup>a</sup> Largely an outcome of ideas discussed by Sir Edward Grey and House.

In February 1916, recognising from the reception given to him by German leaders that they would not dream of accepting such terms,<sup>4</sup> House, with Wilson's concurrence, offered to France and Great Britain that America should propose this settlement whenever they desired, and that, if Germany refused, she would enter the war on the side of the Allies.<sup>5</sup> Sir Edward Grey, though he would have accepted this offer had France or Russia so wished, did not feel sure that it would uproot the system of militarism, and in any case Britain could not think of pressing these terms on France or Russia, the extent of whose sacrifices had, till then, enormously exceeded her own.

Neither France nor Russia made any move; Wilson's offer appeared to have been, for the time being, shelved. But he was all the more determined that some league should be established to prevent nations from interrupting the peace of the world. Unfortunately, in his incursions into world politics, the great President was wont to throw out some sop either to domestic opposition in America or to his own self-conscious aloofness, and he made use at this juncture of terms which could only imply that he regarded the morality of the two causes as equal. This was not, at that time, his real attitude, or necessary for his purpose, but it was deeply wounding and caused an immediate coldness on the part of the Allies towards any American intervention. The President's resentment at this rebuff widened the estrangement, and caused him to persuade himself that the war aims of the Allies were as iniquitous as those of the Germans. Differences arising at this time concerning the blockade caused America to threaten reprisals against the Allies, and to commence the increase of her navy.

It was at this stage that Germany made at least a manœuvre towards peace. Among some of her civil leaders, since the failure of Verdun had been added to that of the Marne, there had existed a genuine desire for peace negotiations. This was shared by some of the royal

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<sup>4</sup> Germany required an indemnity in return even for evacuating Belgium and France. Zimmermann, Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, actually wrote to House: "Although I can assure you that Germany has the welfare of Belgium very much at heart, still she is not able to forget what a terrific cost was paid for the resistance our men encountered there."

<sup>5</sup> In reply to a French suggestion, he even agreed that they might first see if complete victory could be reached in the Allies' summer offensive of 1916; if not, the Allies could then appeal to America to mediate for the settlement suggested by her.

leaders,<sup>6</sup> who foresaw impoverishment of their country and a republican revolution if the struggle was fought to its end. Moreover, offers might be made to some of Germany's opponents which would cause pacifist agitation among them, and might induce some to desert the rest. The military staff, however, had been utterly hostile to any movement for peace, and the German people, fed with false reassurances as to the future, was more opposed even than the Allies to the notion of American intervention. Nevertheless in September, without the knowledge of the German people, their leaders adopted a change of attitude so momentous as to determine the course of the war not merely in 1917, but till its close in Germany's defeat.

It will be remembered that, at Christmas 1915, the then chief of the German staff, Falkenhayn, supported two plans for the securing of victory. The first was an "unrestricted" submarine campaign against England's food-supplies; but this was abandoned in April through American protests, culminating with that which was made after the sinking of the *Sussex*.<sup>7</sup> against the torpedoing of merchant ships without warning. Germany had thus been forced to rely solely on the second plan—a military blow, aimed really at England, but struck through France.<sup>8</sup> This blow fell at Verdun; but, although France suffered there 410,000 casualties, she had not been induced to make terms; on the contrary, with the British she had struck back on the Somme in the tremendous combined offensive which occupied the second half of 1916; and, in September of that year, Ludendorff and Hindenburg, after acquainting themselves with the situation on the Western Front, came to the conclusion that Germany's hope of winning the war on land had now definitely passed. "Unrestricted" submarine warfare was now the only means left to secure a victorious end to the war within a reasonable time."<sup>9</sup> There existed, however, a temporary obstacle—the fear of two small neutrals. That America would be brought in, they accepted as certain, but believed that any force she could send in time would be inconsiderable. But Denmark and Holland lay on Germany's borders, and she could

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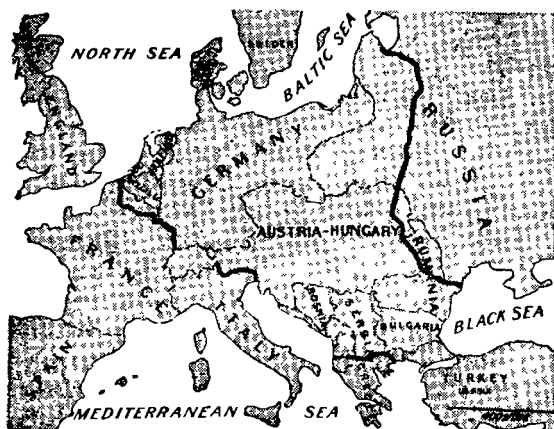
<sup>6</sup> For example, the Crown Prince of Germany.

<sup>7</sup> See Vol. IX, p. 274, footnote.

<sup>8</sup> See Vol. III, p. 224 seq.

<sup>9</sup> *My War Memories*, by Ludendorff, Vol. I, p. 312.

not at the moment spare any troops to face them. The defeat of Roumania, however, would entirely change the situation—not only could divisions then be hurried back to the Dutch border, but



small neutrals would have received a warning of what might happen to them also, if they intervened. As soon as Roumania was beaten, therefore, the submarine campaign should be sanctioned. Ludendorff's decision was that of a gambler throwing upon the table the last stake of a family which he had kept in ignorance of the risk.

At this juncture he and Hindenburg consented that President Wilson should be asked by Germany to mediate. The submarine campaign could not be launched effectively until February, and, if the belligerents could be brought to a conference, Germany, holding the stakes, might secure favourable terms. It was thought that Wilson would act quickly, since the step might help him in the Presidential election then impending. The proposal was therefore made to him by the German ambassador at Washington, Count Bernstorff, who added an authorised hint that, if the suggestion was not acted upon, Germany must resume the policy of unrestricted submarine attacks.

The American election was to be held on November 7th. It was an affair mainly of internal politics, but Wilson also relied on his past success in keeping America out of the war.<sup>10</sup> "Peace and Prosperity" was one of his slogans. His attitude was that those who made war should be regarded as interrupters of the world's peace, and the proposal for a

<sup>10</sup> His opponent, Hughes, stood for a "firmer" foreign policy.



"League to Enforce Peace" was on his programme. He did not, however, reply to Bernstorff's proposal. Accordingly, on October 31st the German Emperor, prompted by the Austrian foreign minister, Baron Burian, but also urged by motives perhaps generous though mixed, decided to make a direct proposal to his enemies. Their peoples (he wrote to the Chancellor, Bethmann-Hollweg) were longing for an end to the struggle, but none of their leaders possessed the moral courage to broach the question. Placing his trust in God, he would dare to take that step.

Ludendorff, though sceptical, agreed that "it should be tried." If the peace offer were refused, this could be used as a strong argument for the necessity to wage unrestricted submarine war, and to delay the declaration of war which would inevitably follow from America and some other neutrals. One consequence, however, Ludendorff feared: it might be greeted as a sign that Germany was weakening. In order to avoid discouraging the German troops, he insisted that the note should be written in a tone full of confidence; and, to avoid giving false notions to foreigners, it should not be sent until Roumania had been crushed. On December 6th, when Bucharest fell—the auxiliary service law also having been passed by the Reichstag and Germany's will to increase her effort thereby shown—this condition was fulfilled, and on the 12th, in the form of a letter to President Wilson, the note was published. It contained no sign of weakness!

The most formidable war known to history has been for two and a half years ravaging a great part of the world. . . . In that strife Germany and her Allies, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, and Turkey, have given proof of their indestructible strength in winning considerable successes at war. Their unshakable lines resist ceaseless attacks of their enemies' arms. The recent diversion in the Balkans was speedily and victoriously thwarted. The latest events have demonstrated that a continuation of the war cannot break their resisting power. The general situation much justified their hope of fresh successes. . . . They do not seek to crush or annihilate their adversaries. Conscious of their military and economic strength, and ready to carry on to the end, if they must, the struggle that is forced upon them, but animated at the same time by the desire to stem the flood of blood and to bring the horrors of war to an end, the Four Allied Powers propose to enter even now into peace negotiations. They feel sure that the propositions which they would bring forward, and which would aim to assure the existence, honour, and free development of their peoples, would be such as to serve as a basis for the restoration of a lasting peace.

Whether intentionally or not, Ludendorff's precautions against an admission of weakness had made quite certain

of the note's rejection. The diary of an Australian attached to I Anzac Headquarters, under date December 16th, records in soldier language the opinion at the British front:—

The Kaiser's "offer" of peace is the talk of everybody. The talk with which he launches it puts peace quite out of the question. As X (a fellow officer) says: "If he'd only admit that militarism was wrong, or had shot its bolt—that would be half of what the world's fighting for, and we could forgive a good deal. But the beggar must announce that he offers the world peace because he has smashed it . . . he puts peace out of the question by his bloody preamble!"

This point deserves stressing because, in spite of the reaction and cynicism which naturally followed the war, a moral issue was involved and was the cause for which thousands of Australians and vast numbers of their Allies fought and died. In spite of the war weariness of that winter—or perhaps because of it—the issue was recognised at that time with a keenness which cannot be recaptured by historians, but which comes to men who know that here and now they have to decide a momentous issue, such as this, on which the future of their country and of the world directly depends. On a writer whose recollection of that mental struggle is vivid there lies a responsibility of recording it. In spite of elements of depression, the British people—markedly firmer than some of their leaders<sup>11</sup>—had no intention of giving up the struggle until there was unmistakable evidence that the German people had been subjected at least to sufficient strain to cause their rulers permanently to abjure reliance on force as their normal method in world politics. The motives which swayed individual leaders were doubtless diverse; but, to the British citizen turning over the issues in his mind while he dug his back-garden, or to the soldier in the rear areas puffing his cigarette as he read of the German offer and the answer to it in the Paris edition of *The Daily Mail*, this is how the situation appeared: the papers (which from the first loudly rejected the Kaiser's offer) of course "talked a lot of hot air"; one must discount all that stuff. Peace would mean everything to a man, especially to those at the front—life, home, riddance from this dog's existence in the mud; and yet—no use to break off the fight while the German Emperor went on swashbuckling. The Kaiser would have proved his method right, and we—or at any rate the

<sup>11</sup> Only in Wales does there seem to have been any real disposition to weaken

next generation—would have the job to do over again in a few years' time. If there were a revolution in Germany—if the rule of the Kaiser and a military clique was replaced by real democracy, with all power for war and peace in the hands of the people themselves—that would be a guarantee against the recurrence of war. But there was no sign of that, and, though peace was infinitely desirable, it was not worth stopping the fight in the circumstances then existing. As nearly as the present writer can in a few words represent them, these were the feelings of the average soldier and citizen which gave stiffness to the British Empire and to its leaders, and to the British and dominion soldiers at the front. The feeling of the French was more personal and bitter.

The "peace offer," as has been related, was rejected, and unquestionably its rejection was justified. The only lesson forced upon Germany by the war at that stage was, not that ruin comes of trusting solely to force, but that her force on this occasion had not been sufficient. Her people had not, in 1916, suffered so deeply as to disillusion them concerning the militaristic method and the leaders who advocated it. The German nation would merely have determined to place its strength beyond question next time. Other nations would have been forced to keep pace with it, and an ending of the war on even terms at the end of 1916 would only have meant that the struggle was temporarily broken off, to be renewed after a few years of intensive preparation.

Meanwhile, on November 7th President Wilson had been re-elected. This event probably freed him from the shackles which both candidates had placed upon their speeches, and, in an address delivered in New York on December 2nd—that is, shortly before the publication of the German note—he had given evidence of an attitude more comprehensible at least to British and French people:

With all due and sincere respect for those who represent other forms of government than ours . . . peace cannot come so long as the destinies of man are determined by small groups who make selfish choices of their own.

In reality he seems at this time to have been striving like a hunted animal to escape from a growing certainty that the Germans would reopen the submarine campaign and thus force America into the war. The one chance seemed to be

immediate mediation by himself with a view to forcing into peace whichever side was recalcitrant.<sup>12</sup> Against the inclination of Colonel House, he drafted an offer to mediate, but it had not been delivered when, on December 12th, there was published the "peace note" from Germany. With the almost desperate intention of making his offer known to the Allies before they closed the door to peace by refusing the invitation from Germany, Wilson on the 18th despatched his note. It suggested to both sides that they should state openly the terms on which they would respectively be willing to make peace. The war, Wilson wrote, was profoundly disturbing the whole world.

No nation . . . can be said in truth to stand outside its influence or to be safe against its disturbing effects. And yet the concrete objects for which it is being waged have never been definitely stated.

The leaders of the several belligerents have . . . stated those objects in general terms. But, stated in general terms, they seem the same on both sides. Never yet have the authoritative spokesmen of either side avowed the precise objects which would, if attained, satisfy them and their people that the war had been fought out.

Again the President could not avoid throwing an unnecessary sop to his own conceit of himself as the impartial judge of brawling offenders. His statement that the objects of the war seemed "the same on both sides" was a verbal quibble deeply wounding to the greater part of the French and British peoples. Despite the blunting of ideals, and mixture of motives inevitable in the late stages of such a struggle, it was in the main for principles for which the American nation had always stood that they were fighting against an enemy whose success could only result in a deadly blow to these principles. They regarded Wilson's note with the utmost resentment as an attempt to force the Allies into the peace negotiations offered by the Germans. Yet (as John Buchan has pointed out<sup>13</sup>) the President's note had one beneficial result—it compelled most thinking men to consider anew the principles for which they were fighting, of which their view had been dimmed by the dust and turmoil of the long struggle.

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<sup>12</sup> America might have attempted to effect this in the case of the Allies by refusing ammunition and credits

<sup>13</sup> *A History of the Great War, Vol III, pp. 558-61*

The answer of the Allies to the German peace offer<sup>14</sup> stated that peace could not be made unless it provided reparation for the injury inflicted, and guarantees against future aggression. There being clearly no hope that such reparation and guarantees would be given, the Allies must refuse to enter into the proposed negotiations. The answer to President Wilson was delivered on January 11th. The President can hardly have expected to receive from either side a detailed statement; at so late a stage in any struggle, especially one involving so many nations, terms cannot be crystallised even among allies without many sharp conflicts of interests. In the extremities to which such a struggle forces them, nations are driven to secure the adhesion of important allies by promises which, if success in the war is not attained, may be difficult to liquidate. Thus, to secure the help of Italy, Great Britain and France had been forced to make her, in a secret treaty, the promise of extensive territory which was still in Austrian hands. Other treaties had been made at the request of France and Russia guaranteeing them spheres in Asia Minor and Syria at the end of the war. The reopening of these promises was not to be thought of without wrecking the alliance. Publication of the treaties—indispensable though they were—would also have alienated American and other neutral sympathy, caused dissension among the Allies, and provided fresh grounds for pacifist agitation.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> It was handed on Dec. 30 to the United States ambassador in Paris for transmission to Germany.

<sup>15</sup> The guarded statement actually made caused, in certain quarters in Holland, the pessimistic comment that it seemed that both sides were out for conquest. This was true only to the extent that, while one side, when the outbreak occurred, had deliberately sought conquest, the other had been forced to seek it. There were indeed still in Great Britain leaders, such as Grey and Asquith, who did not believe in conquest, and who would definitely have preferred to end the war without it. Behind them was a noble element with the same views. These ideals, however, were gradually being worn down in the wear and tear of the long war. It should not, however, be assumed that even the secret treaties were unjustifiable. The moral responsibility for such arrangements lies with the nation which forces another into war. A people driven to seek help in order to save its free existence may have to offer the aggressor's territory as a prize for a prospective ally. "To those who denounce secret treaties," writes Sir Edward Grey (*Twenty-five Years*, Vol. II, p. 161), "the just reply is: 'You are quite right: in time of peace all secret treaties are wrong and detestable; so is the use of poison gas; but, in a great war, you will be driven in self-defence to use both.'"

In case an Australian is disposed to be critical of the engagements thus entered into, let it be remembered that some of these rose through the unwillingness of governments (for example, of the Russian in regard to Asia Minor) to contemplate the return to the enemy of territory occupied by their troops. In the event of a negotiated peace, this question would immediately have arisen with respect to the former German colonies in the Pacific, then occupied by Australia, New Zealand, and Japan. While it is possible, and even probable, that the dominions and Japan would have agreed to the return of these colonies as part of the price of the

Much less was it practicable for the Central Powers to state their terms. Although moderate elements did exist among German leaders, the Government, overshadowed by the military leaders, had not even made up its mind to grant unconditional independence to Belgium. It had no intention of renouncing, in advance, the hold of Germany and her allies on Serbia, Roumania, and parts of Russia, and the German people, still encouraged to hope for complete victory, would not have dreamed of allowing this renunciation. Yet some such settlement was the least that America could have stood for.

In this quandary the German Government refused to state its peace terms, pleading that it had made a direct offer to its opponents. At the same time it instructed its ambassador to endeavour to secure Wilson's mediation, but to keep him from insisting upon a statement of Germany's terms. The Allies, on the other hand, replied on January 11th in a note which was surprisingly frank. While laying down that their war aims, "with all the compensations and equitable indemnities for harm suffered," would only be set forth in detail at the moment of negotiation, they outlined as follows their terms in regard to territory:

They (the terms) imply, necessarily and first of all, the restoration of Belgium, Serbia, and Montenegro, with the compensations due to them; the evacuation of the invaded territories in France, in Russia, in Rumania, with just reparation; the reorganisation of Europe, guaranteed by a stable régime and based at once on respect for nationalities and on the right to full security and liberty of economic development possessed by all peoples, small and great, and at the same time upon territorial conventions and international settlements such as to guarantee land and sea frontiers against unjustified attack; the restitution of provinces formerly torn from the Allies by force or against the wish of their inhabitants; the liberation of the Italians, as also the Slavs, Rumanes, and Czecho-Slovaks, from foreign domination; the setting free of populations subject to the bloody tyranny of the Turks; and the turning out of Europe of the Ottoman Empire as decidedly foreign to Western civilisation. The intentions of His Majesty the Emperor of Russia in regard to Poland have been clearly indicated by the manifesto he has just issued to his armies.<sup>16</sup>

liberation of Belgium and other territory occupied by the Germans, some Australian leaders might have vehemently denounced the suggestion (*see p. 692, Chap. XVII*). Certainly the British Government could not have hinted at such a solution except after long and close consultation with the dominions. Australians are aware that their own desire to control New Guinea arose purely from the fear that, in German or other hands, it might prove a base for future aggression or complications affecting the White Australia policy. The British Government could not have roughly overridden these considerations for the sake of giving a prompt answer to President Wilson.

<sup>16</sup> On Nov. 5 Germany and Austria had promised to grant Poland "independence" by establishing a hereditary monarchy with an army "in union" with those of Germany and Austria. This proclamation was obviously issued in order that the

To Wilson, now desperately turning to every honourable device that might avert America's precipitation into the war, mediation still seemed possible if he could secure a statement of Germany's peace terms. Since his rebuffs by the Allies he had persuaded himself that the Germans were as likely as they to offer terms that he would consider fair, "and the fact that Germany relied on him (writes Bernstorff) stimulated his self-esteem to such an extent that he became, to a certain degree, interested in bringing about a peace that would be satisfactory to Germany." The German ambassador was trying to induce him to propose two separate conferences—America engaging in a discussion of general questions (such as those of the freedom of the seas and League of Nations), but leaving the belligerents to settle territorial questions among themselves; Bernstorff calculated that, once the conferences had met, nothing would induce the American people to take up arms over some territorial dispute in Europe. But Germany's continued reluctance to state her terms was rendering Wilson impotent. When Bernstorff explained that the German terms could not be published because their moderation would be taken for weakness, he was even advised that Germany should ask for more<sup>17</sup>—anything to get the belligerents to the conference table. Wilson dreaded that America would be dragged into the war at the heels of France and England, and, to make it plain that in the day of settlement she would stand for no selfish aims or vindictive peace-terms, he delivered on January 22nd to the Senate the famous speech embodying his plan that the war should end in the establishment of a league to guarantee peace, in which the United States would participate.<sup>18</sup> It must, however, be a "peace without victory," in the sense that neither side should suffer intolerable humiliation; it must establish government by consent of the governed; and it must guarantee "the freedom of the seas."<sup>19</sup> During the next

raising of the army might be begun at once—and it was so begun. On Nov. 15 the Czar issued a counter-proclamation confirming a promise to Poland of "autonomy" (under somewhat similar conditions). This was confirmed in his message to the Russian Armies on Christmas Day.

<sup>17</sup> This suggestion was made by Robert Lansing, Secretary of State, but presumably with the acquiescence of Wilson.

<sup>18</sup> It would, he explained, adopt the Monroe Doctrine as the doctrine of the world.

<sup>19</sup> This was an old doctrine, involving the denial of rights now claimed by Britain of interference with neutral shipping, and had been adopted and rejected by many nations, including the United States, as suited their interests at the moment. The President now proposed to make the League of Nations the only authority which could authorise interference with shipping.

few days he actually agreed with Bernstorff to propose the double peace conference if the German Government would impart to him, even privately, its terms.

But, on the day on which this offer reached Berlin, it was already too late. The submarines, with orders to reopen the campaign, had already sailed for their allotted positions, and the Chancellor was informed by the naval authorities that they could not recall them.<sup>20</sup> A reply outlining in private the terms which, it was said, Germany would previously have offered to the Allies<sup>21</sup> was despatched for the President; but it contained also the announcement that Germany was forced by the Allies' blockade to resume unrestricted submarine warfare.<sup>22</sup>

On January 31st the German Government, after the usual short campaign of preparatory falsehood,<sup>23</sup> issued its warning to neutrals that from February 1st the waters around Great Britain, France, and Italy were to be considered a barred zone, in which merchant ships would be liable to be sunk without notice. This withdrawal of the pledge given to America nine months before destroyed the trust which President Wilson had been inclined to place in Germany's protestations. Diplomatic relations with her were at once broken off, and, after two months of anguished depression, in which he still sought some honourable alternative, the President was, on April 2nd, forced by the increasingly

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<sup>20</sup> Hindenburg states that he did not know of Wilson's offer until October 1918.

<sup>21</sup> The terms were said to be those on which Germany would have been prepared to negotiate with her enemies if they had accepted her offer of Dec. 12. They included the restitution of French and Belgian territory, subject to conditions and guarantees. According to the United States ambassador in Berlin (Hon. J. W. Gerard), the conditions would probably be the retention of a German garrison at Namur, Liège, and other fortresses; German ownership of the Belgian railways, and a "rectification" of the French and Russian frontiers, the fate of Roumania must lie in Bulgaria's hands, and that of Serbia in Austria's; and Germany must receive indemnities from all her opponents, and all her ships and colonies must be returned to her.

<sup>22</sup> She offered to call off the submarines "the moment we are completely assured that the President's efforts will lead to a peace that would be acceptable to us."

<sup>23</sup> For example, a statement that the British were using hospital ships to carry combatants and ammunition. This was to prepare world-opinion for the abrogation of the immunity of these ships, which the unrestricted submarine campaign would necessitate. Another statement was that the British were about to instal guns in the bows as well as on the sterns of merchant vessels. Statements of German soldiers captured during the winter had strengthened the impression that some new frightfulness was impending. An Australian diary on Jan. 13 says: "The Germans are preparing the neutrals for their new poison bombs and submarine campaign. With this new poison gas and the help of God, the Kaiser says (in effect), they will overcome us and give their blessings to the world."



aggravated causes of hostility,<sup>24</sup> to advise Congress to declare war. It was declared on April 6th. Holland and Denmark, as Ludendorff had expected, remained neutral.

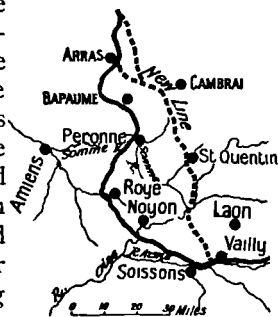
The fatal decision to launch the submarine campaign had been precipitated by the anxiety caused to Ludendorff through Nivelle's victory on December 15th at Verdun. A week later it was formally urged by Hindenburg, and it was finally agreed to by the Kaiser and civil and military chiefs at a conference on January 9th at G.H.Q. Hindenburg and Ludendorff now staked everything on the submarine. The chief of the naval staff assured them that the economic difficulties caused by the destruction of merchant ships would force England to seek peace within six months, and this was also the opinion of German economists. Ludendorff did not accept this estimate literally, but he "did think it safe to reckon that it would have a decisive effect within twelve months." America would come in and would raise a new army as Great Britain had done, but it could not be thrown into the scale within twelve months. The German policy for 1917, therefore, was to urge on the naval campaign with all speed, and—on land—to hold out as long as possible in order to give the submarines time to be effective.

For their land campaign, Hindenburg and Ludendorff would have wished to adopt a plan of offensive-defensive—by striking, for example, at the sides of the re-entrant driven into their lines on the Somme, which rendered dangerous the German positions on either side of it. But that was an area in which the British and French were very strong; and, with the apparent certainty of tremendous attacks upon the Russian and all other fronts, the question arose—could the German staff afford to concentrate all its reserves for an offensive of its own in this region? This was held to be too dangerous, and all notion of attacking was therefore abandoned—the only course was to prepare to beat off the coming attacks. But both Hindenburg and Ludendorff stress the fact that,

<sup>24</sup> Although the German Government was certain that the submarine campaign would bring America into the war, it was obviously its policy to delay that event as long as possible. Germany was first warned that, if American ships were sunk and American lives lost, protective steps would be taken. If the submarine campaign was to be effective such losses were inevitable, and they were increasingly incurred during March. But the German Government had also by that time needlessly inflamed American opinion by reckless overtures made to Mexico that she and Japan should join against the United States in the event of war.

in the early part of 1917, they were possessed by deep anxiety as to where and when the Allies would strike. They anticipated a British offensive on and north of the Somme, and—though less confidently—a French offensive some distance south of it; Italy's action also was fairly certain.<sup>25</sup> As to other plans, they were in the dark. The outstanding fact was that their salient north of the Somme battlefield dangerously tempted an attack.

A means existed, however, of avoiding the danger. Almost immediately after their arrival on the Western Front, the new German chiefs, impressed with the possibility of a rupture at any moment on the Somme, had ordered the fortification of a strong rearward line which would either bar the advance of the Allies, if they did break through, or furnish a new front on which the Germans could voluntarily fall back to avoid pressure. This line, about 100 miles in length, ran across the base of the great salient from Arras to Soissons. Its construction had been begun at the end of September. It was now decided to fall back upon it.<sup>26</sup> Not only would the dangerous salient be thus discarded, but two other advantages of equal importance would be gained: first, by the shortening of the line, a large number of divisions would be saved; and, second, the offensives which the British and French were apparently planning upon that front would be dislocated and delayed. Delay even for a month or six weeks would help towards giving the submarines time to obtain a decision. Incidentally, as the new line was being laid out in quiet conditions and not on the battlefield, its situation would be determined by considerations of fortification and engineering, and would afford stronger and more comfortable shelter than the existing positions. It would, for example, be provided with concrete dugouts and



<sup>25</sup> "There was no doubt about the continuation of the struggle on the Isonzo front. Trieste was Italy's goal." (Ludendorff, *My War Memories*, Vol. II, p. 404.)

<sup>26</sup> This intention had long been held, but no final decision had previously been come to. Crown Prince Rupprecht favoured the withdrawal; the commander of the First Army (Below) was against it.

immensely broad belts of wire. The depth of the retirement would vary from twelve miles near Bapaume to thirty near Roye. By the destruction of houses and trees, a fifteen-kilometre belt in front of the new line could therefore be laid bare of all shelter for hostile troops or guns, roads and railways damaged, and bridges and wells rendered useless.

In spite of these great advantages, the plan appeared to both Hindenburg and Ludendorff to involve one outstanding danger: "it implied a confession of weakness, bound to raise the morale of the enemy and lower our own. But as it was necessary for military reasons, we had no choice; it had to be carried out." The officers responsible for secret intelligence and for press propaganda were instructed to blind not only the enemy intelligence staff, but the German and neutral press, with false expectations and, when the retreat took place, with false interpretations of its true import.<sup>27</sup> The order for the operation (which was given the code name "Alberich") was issued with the utmost secrecy on February 4th. For better control, the German armies in France and Belgium were at this stage divided into three groups<sup>28</sup>—left, right, and centre. The right group, which for the remainder of the war was commanded by Crown Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria,<sup>29</sup> and which included the whole front opposite the British, was charged with making all preparations for the great retreat.

Thus, whether credited or not, the statements referred to in the previous chapter,<sup>30</sup> of prisoners taken on February 24th and 25th, gave the British accurate information of the enemy campaign for 1917. His detailed plans were, of course, unknown, and, before they are described, the narrative must show how the Allies through mists of uncertainty groped after their retiring opponents.

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<sup>27</sup> *My War Memories*, Vol. I, pp. 407-8.

<sup>28</sup> The Crown Prince Rupprecht and the Crown Prince of Germany had been appointed to their groups at the end of August 1916. The First Army Commander (Below) had previously been under the commander of the Second (Gallwitz).

<sup>29</sup> In this group were the Sixth, First, Second, and (for a time) the Seventh Armies. The other groups were under the German Crown Prince and Duke Albrecht of Württemberg.

<sup>30</sup> P. 43.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE GERMANS RETIRE

THE I Anzac Corps was in the midst of the sector concerned with the great German manoeuvre of 1917; but the credit of discovering that the enemy's forward positions in front of the Fifth Army were being abandoned does not belong to it. This was not due to any slackness of the patrols. Every night each battalion had several small parties crawling about the mud between their own wire and the enemy's, and examining the entanglements in front of The Maze, and the "Hook," "Butte," and "Gird" Trenches, which the 1st and 2nd Divisions were shortly to attack.

The staffs of I Anzac and all other corps of the Fifth Army<sup>1</sup> had on February 22nd received from Fifth Army Headquarters a remarkable item of information. It was stated that wireless messages sent out on February 20th and 21st from the rear areas of three of the German divisions facing that army contained orders for the wireless stations in those areas "to dismantle and be prepared to move with all material, and not to leave anything behind." The northern forward stations were to move back to their rear station. The message from Fifth Army added:

Since these orders were intercepted, no further messages from the forward stations in question have been picked up. . . . While no definite conclusion as to the withdrawal of troops can be drawn from the intercepted messages, they are undoubtedly significant, and, if indications from other sources could be obtained of alterations in the enemy's dispositions, they might furnish valuable corroborative evidence.

That the enemy should withdraw from the lines which he had held so stoutly throughout the winter, and on the problems of every yard of which the attention of both sides had for months been concentrated, was so unbelievable that army headquarters made no haste to circulate this news, and the I Anzac intelligence staff, assuming that it was informed "just on the chance of there being something in it," actually omitted to pass on the information to its four divisions in the

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<sup>1</sup> These were the II and V Corps in the line, and the XIII Corps in reserve.

line.<sup>2</sup> The result was that the reports of their patrols at work throughout the night, though abundant and excellently accurate, furnished nothing which, unless illuminated by knowledge that a withdrawal was suspected, could have roused the suspicions of the most penetrating commander. The 4th Australian Division was that night busy with its last bombing attack in Stormy Trench. The thirty-two prisoners taken were examined in the normal course, but, though they answered freely and said they were expecting to be "relieved" at 3 a.m., none dropped any hint of a withdrawal.<sup>3</sup> As for the patrols, the dense fog following on the thaw was rendered luminous by the flares constantly thrown by the enemy, but little could be seen through it. From the sounds of snipers' rifles—active except near The Maze—of occasional machine-guns, and of a number of German working parties, the patrols inferred that the enemy was holding his line in strength.

It is possible to remark, after the events, that in the recorded reports of the patrols an abnormal amount of noise is attributed to the German fatigue parties, usually so cautious. Scouts of the 8th Brigade noticed

talking, splashing, and an unusual amount of noise in Sunray Trench from 6 p.m. to 8.30 p.m., when normal quiet was resumed.

Scouts of the 48th Battalion (12th Brigade), who in the small hours of the 23rd reconnoitred Stormy Trench beyond the point attacked by the 45th, reported:

*Enemy strongly holding positions. Much talking.*

The early night patrols of the 5th Brigade stated that, near the old light-railway terminus at Le Sars, then in No-Man's Land,

working parties were distinctly heard . . . but dense fog obscured their movements.

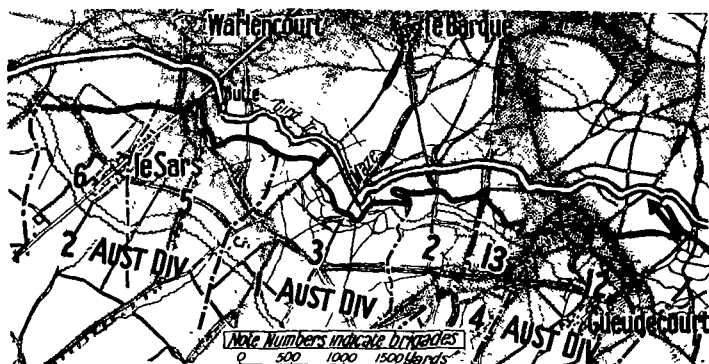
In front of the Butte flares and rifle-grenades were frequently fired . . . considerable talking and coughing could be heard.

An enemy working party . . . were using shovels behind their own wire.

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<sup>2</sup>It is true that, earlier in the winter, two prisoners had told the I Anzac intelligence staff that the Germans intended to withdraw to a line at Cambrai. The statement made some impression at the time and was passed on to the Fourth Army staff, which, however, was sceptical.

<sup>3</sup>With the exception of one man of the 161st Minenwerfer Company, all the prisoners belonged to the I and III/362 I.R. of the 4th Ersatz Division. The statement about "relief" came from the 12th company (III Bn.).



Arrow shows 4th Div. attack.

A late patrol (about 2-3 a.m.) stated:

About M.17.A.5.3 (German front line south of the Butte of Warlencourt), a machine-gun was seen to fire about 25 yards away (from the patrol). . . . Fifty yards west of this there was much sniping fire going on. . . . Enemy parties were at work all round this vicinity, but fog prevented the patrol from distinguishing exactly what was going on.

A hundred yards to the left the patrol saw "a number of snipers' posts from which flares and rifle-shots were fired." The patrols would naturally wonder why there was so much sniping activity in a fog which hid all targets. Scouts of the 5th Brigade reported that the German machine-guns were ready to fire upon the least sound. A party from the 6th Brigade, north of the road to Bapaume, came suddenly on some Germans lying out north of Le Sars and was bombed, a corporal being killed. On the other hand, the 1st Division opposite The Maze found the enemy inactive. Its "summary" said:

It is probable that a relief took place opposite our left section (3rd Brigade) last night. Very few flares were fired, and hostile artillery was inactive.

Brief *précis* of patrol reports reached corps headquarters in the divisional summaries late in the day, and nothing unusual was remarked in them. The dawn reports from the 2nd and 4th Divisions had simply recorded "situation normal," and those from the 1st and 5th "situation quiet." The II Corps said the same, and the Fifth Army "front quiet."<sup>4</sup> Yet, as

<sup>4</sup> The Fifth Army, however, excepted the front of the 4th Aust. Division, which had attacked during the night

will be related,<sup>5</sup> the sector of each German regiment on most of the Fifth Army's front had since 1 a.m. been occupied by only about twenty men. Most of these withdrew at daylight.

The day which followed, February 23rd, appeared to all troops on the Anzac front to be absolutely normal. Reports from the left and centre stated that there was no sniping, but the mist which continued till midday "prevented activity" by Australian snipers also. The enemy's machine-guns were "more quiet than usual," except in firing overhead on back areas. His trench-mortars were "very inactive," but his artillery "much more active." Early in the afternoon a fire was seen in Warlencourt. On the right, German machine-guns and snipers fired normally, and artillery was active.<sup>6</sup> All the extant evening reports from the Australian divisions<sup>7</sup> represent the situation as "normal" or "unchanged." The evening report from the Fifth Army mentioned that the 18th British Division (V Corps) had during the day occupied a position in the salient south of Miraumont without meeting resistance.

Early in the night of the 23rd, however, the attention of several battalion commanders was focussed on the German trenches facing their several sectors by reports very different from those previously received. From the right leftwards, in the 5th Division a patrol<sup>8</sup> reconnoitring Sunray Trench, which that division was to attack a few days later, found that it was empty except for a single enemy post; yet the enemy was throwing an unusual number of flares. Patrols of the left brigade (12th) of the 4th Division,<sup>9</sup> found Stormy Trench full of movement till 8.30, but very quiet from that time on. Along the front of the 1st and 2nd Divisions almost every patrol brought back the news that, in contrast to its abnormal activity on the past few nights, the German front appeared to be almost dead. The known points from which machine-guns usually fired were silent; flares were being

<sup>5</sup> P. 80.

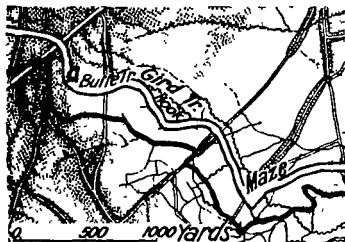
<sup>6</sup> The ordinary weekly summary of operations sent to corps headquarters that day by the 1st Aust. Division contained the information, *afterwards* noted as significant: "There appears to have been a steady diminution of hostile fire, which indicates a decrease in guns. This has been made up (for) in a certain measure by a considerable increase in the number of trench-mortars employed against our front line."

<sup>7</sup> That from the 2nd Division is missing from the records.

<sup>8</sup> Of the 31st Battalion (8th Brigade)

<sup>9</sup> The right brigade (13th) of the 4th Division was relieved that night.

thrown all along the front—but from positions well in rear of the trenches usually held.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, patrols of the 3rd and 5th Brigades, examining, as previously, the entanglements at The Maze and Hook Trench, found that the enemy was deliberately shelling those positions. In the 3rd Brigade, at about 11 p.m., a patrol of the 10th Battalion entered Hook Sap and found it empty. The fact was reported to the brigadier, H. G. Bennett, in time to allow him to send out before daylight special patrols of both 9th and 10th “to verify,” as he wrote later, “the suspicion that the enemy was clearing out.”



The patrols (he wrote afterwards) could not hear any movement whatever in the enemy lines. They should have endeavoured to enter the enemy trench. . . . The cause for this omission I put down to the effects of trench-warfare.

Near Butte Trench patrols of the 5th Brigade entered at least one small post from which the enemy had just withdrawn. No less than five of the local commanders in their several small sectors made their own arrangements to act upon the surprising information received.<sup>11</sup> But it is astonishing that not one of them ensured that the attention of the divisional staff should be immediately and urgently drawn to the news.<sup>12</sup> As a result, the morning reports from the four divisions to corps headquarters on February 24th still ran :—

5th Division: "Situation quiet."  
 4th Division: "Situation normal."  
 1st Division: "Situation normal."  
 2nd Division: "Situation normal."

<sup>10</sup> In the 3rd Brigade the 9th Battalion reported this at The Maze, and the 10th opposite Gird Trench; in the 5th Brigade, the 18th Battalion reported to the same effect south of the Butte, and the 20th west of it.

<sup>11</sup> Colonel Leane of the 48th decided to send a team of bombers after dusk on the next night into Stormy Trench where it was reported empty. General Bennett ordered patrols of the 9th and 10th, when darkness fell, actually to enter the German trenches with a view to their immediate occupation if the Germans were not found there. Colonel Murphy of the 18th had dummy figures exhibited on the parapet of his front line during the morning, in order to draw fire, they were not fired on, and some of the officers confirmed the test by walking about fully exposed in places where, two days before, it would have meant certain death.

<sup>12</sup> The commander of the 10th (Lieut.-Col. R. B. Jacob) did, however, at once inform his brigadier.



The II Corps reported "situation quiet," and Fifth Army "situation normal." Yet, except for a few patrols, the German front line had then lain empty for twenty-four hours.

It almost appears as if the information would hardly have reached corps headquarters before the following night<sup>13</sup> had not Colonel Bridges, the chief-of-staff of the 2nd Division, happened about 10 a.m. to visit the headquarters of the 5th Brigade to discuss preparations for the coming attack. During the interview Brigadier-General Smith informed him of the patrol reports. The local opinion was that the Germans were abandoning a muddy advanced position south of the Butte and possibly also the Butte itself and a neighbouring quarry.<sup>14</sup> The brigadier was going to have the matter probed by patrols after dark. Bridges returned with the news to Brigadier-General Gellibrand, who happened to be in temporary command<sup>15</sup> of the division. The report from the 5th Brigade's front was sent on by them at midday to corps headquarters, which forwarded it at 3 p.m. to army headquarters and to the 1st Division, together with Gellibrand's opinion that the tranquil conditions were due to a relief in the enemy's line.<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile, however, at 2 o'clock General Smith, ringing up the commander of the 3rd Brigade, ascertained that precisely similar reports had been received from its patrols, and that it also was going to probe at dusk. The two brigadiers were convinced that a local retirement at least from The Maze and posts in front of the Butte had taken place, and they arranged to co-ordinate their reconnaissances. The patrols would be sent out at 6.30, and, as soon as these reported "all clear," both brigades would advance, the 3rd (1st Division) up to the far side of The Maze, the 5th (2nd Division) to Gird Trench. The artillery would lay its fire no closer than 300 yards from these objectives, until it received further instructions.

<sup>13</sup> The divisional intelligence staffs would sometime during the day have received the typewritten "intelligence summaries" of the brigades and would presumably have noted the reports mentioned in them.

<sup>14</sup> The quarry from whose contents the Butte had been built.

<sup>15</sup> In the absence of its new commander, General Smyth.

<sup>16</sup> This message, sent at 12.40 p.m., was: "During night no enemy machine guns or trench-mortars fired from Butte Trench or vicinity of two posts at M 17.A.3½ 2 (south of the Butte), nor were any flares fired from these positions, although on previous night enemy had been active. Relief is suspected." The telegram was received at corps headquarters at 1.13 p.m. and was shown to General White.

These plans were complete by 4 o'clock, but there is no evidence that the 1st and 2nd Divisions, which made them, informed corps headquarters, nor did corps headquarters, for its part, inform those divisions that, on the previous night, trenches opposite the 4th and 5th Divisions also had been found silent. Consequently until a few minutes before 5 p.m., these facts were assumed to have a purely local significance. At that hour, General White at corps headquarters telephoned to all divisions the news, just received from Fifth Army, that the V Corps had found the German positions in Petit Miraumont and south of it empty. This, he said, combined with the reports of Australian patrols, suggested that "a certain withdrawal of the enemy's forces has taken place or is about to take place."<sup>17</sup>

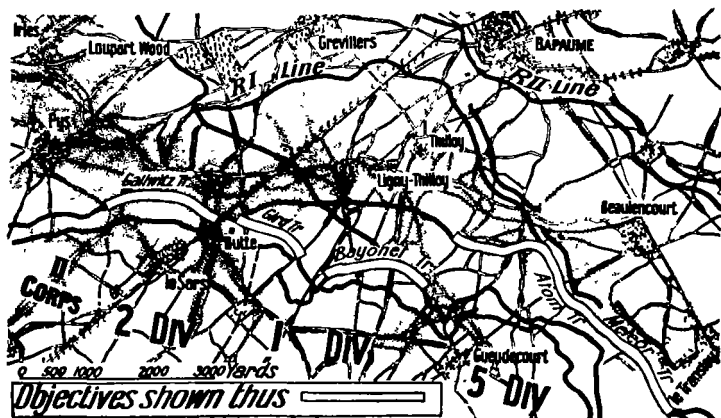
It is astonishing evidence of the paralysing effect of the long tense struggle in the Somme mud that the first general realisation of the truth should have come to the Australian divisions with this message. The only sphere in which the intelligence organisation of the corps had functioned usefully was that of the patrols. Their reports on the nights of the 22nd and 23rd were abundant and accurate in almost every detail; but patrols had only to rivet their attention on the narrow sector immediately in front of them. Unfortunately, almost every department of the staff behind them was doing the same. The leaders, having for months been matching their wits against those of the enemy in solving the problems of their own few acres of muddy front, had lost sight of wider considerations. With them the vital and absorbing matters were next week's raids, the coming offensives, the cutting of wire. Thus staffs, both higher and lower, which for forty-eight hours had vital items of intelligence actually lying on their tables, failed to recognise them and pass them on.

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<sup>17</sup> The words are from the order issued at 8 p.m. confirming the instructions It was then known that the Germans had withdrawn from the point of their salient near Serre. At 6 a.m. on the 24th three patrols of the 7th (British) Division had penetrated as far into Serre as the fire of their own artillery would allow. At 9.45 a.m. Colonel W. W. Norman (of Sidmouth, Devon, Eng) of the 21st Manchester Regiment saw them returning over the crest. They said that not a shot had been fired at them, and no Germans had been seen. "The above report," wrote Colonel Norman, "seems almost incredible, but I am of opinion that it is reliable. If so, it points to the evacuation of Serre by the enemy" (Colonel Norman died on 12 Feb., 1935)

The orders of the 3rd and 5th Brigades were altered to conform with the general instructions telephoned by White from corps headquarters. These directed the three Australian divisions—for the 4th was this night withdrawn—to occupy “without hesitation” all ground discovered to be unoccupied by the enemy up to the several objectives shown below. This advance—1,000 to 1,200 yards on the right and centre,

**German plan suspected**

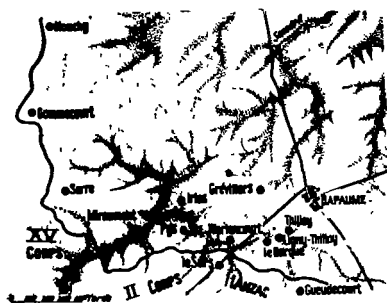


and 500 on the left—would bring them almost to the bottom of the valley which the Germans had held all the winter and, on the right, to the enemy's intermediate line. While the patrols pushed out into the fog, which was less thick than on the 23rd, the whole corps was raised to a high pitch of excitement by the gradual spreading of fresh news from Fifth Army. At 8 o'clock it was heard that Serre,<sup>18</sup> north of the Ancre, had been found abandoned, and that the 2nd British Division (II Corps), on the left of the 2nd Australian, was that night endeavouring to occupy Pys.<sup>19</sup> A few minutes later came another message laying down as the objective of the Fifth Army that night the ruined villages of Warlencourt, Pys, Irlles, Miraumont, and Serre. At 11.15 the II Corps telegraphed that its

<sup>18</sup> The objective of several dreadful attacks in July and November 1916.

<sup>19</sup> In this message Gough instructed I Anzac also to "push forward north to-night and gain touch along whole corps front." But orders to that effect had already been given by Birdwood.

patrols, pushing through the abandoned trenches, had come upon a German, left behind with trench-feet by an enemy rear-guard. He said that Miraumont had been vacated on the night of February 22nd, and that the Germans were withdrawing to a line of trenches at Cambrai, twenty-two miles back.



*Front line during winter, 1916-17.*

It was this statement which transformed the entire outlook of the Fifth Army; indeed, if true, it would obviously affect the plans of the Allies on the whole Western Front. Once or twice during the winter captured Germans had spoken of an extensive trench-line in preparation near Cambrai. They attributed it to the prudence of their new commander-in-chief, and it was referred to in British intelligence summaries as the "Cambrai" or "Hindenburg" line.<sup>20</sup> During the past week prisoners had frequently spoken of it; it had been sighted from the air,<sup>21</sup> and since February 15th several descriptions of it, compiled from this evidence, had appeared among other items in G.H.Q. intelligence summaries.<sup>22</sup> Several thousand men were known to be working in its area, including, besides German troops and French and Russian prisoners, a very large number of French or Belgian civilians brought thither from their homes in other provinces.<sup>23</sup> Broad belts of wire were known to be one of its chief features;<sup>24</sup> exaggerated accounts described them as many hundred metres wide. It had been conjectured

<sup>20</sup> A document of the Fifth Army on Feb. 21 describing the line says: "It is known to the enemy as the Hindenburg Line." Actually it was known to them as the "Siegfried Line."

<sup>21</sup> According to the British Official History (*The War in the Air, Vol. II, p. 317*), observers of the 3rd Brigade, R.F.C., first sighted it during the last days of the Somme battle, especially north of Quéant. On Nov. 9 part of the 11th Squadron, specially sent out, sighted the northern part of it.

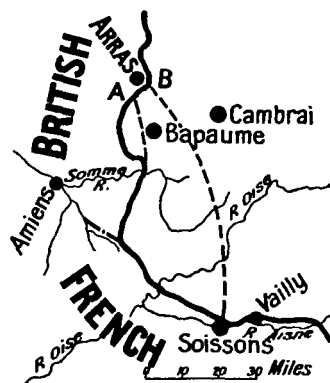
<sup>22</sup> For example, in the G.H.Q. summary on Feb. 15, 20, and 21. A description also appeared in the summary of Fifth Army on the 21st.

<sup>23</sup> Five of the French prisoners of war who escaped and reached the Fourth Army's line on Feb. 18 added some particulars to the knowledge concerning it. It was said that the line was to be ready by Feb. 28, but that was unlikely to be achieved. It was, however (according to a statement of the Fifth Army, Feb. 21), already "very strongly wired and contains a great number of dugouts."

<sup>24</sup> See Vol. XII, plate 311.

that the line was intended to "blunt off" the German salient created by the Battle of the Somme, and it was also noted that it "would provide a strong line of resistance" on which the Germans could "fall back, if forced to evacuate the salient between Arras and the Ancre." German officers taken near Pys on February 17th stated that their higher staff had already decided to retire from Pys and Miraumont, in order to avoid the fire concentrated on those places.<sup>28</sup> The Fifth Army had already observed certain indications that the enemy did not intend to resist its coming offensive at his existing front line, but at his much stronger position around Loupart Wood on the Bapaume heights. To the staff, therefore, a slight retirement was not wholly unexpected.

But the mention of withdrawal to Cambrai fell like a thunderclap both on leaders and on troops. The southern part of the "Hindenburg Line" had not yet been located by British aeroplanes; but a retirement to it would probably mean a withdrawal of the whole German front between Arras and Soissons—95 miles—or even as far as Vailly—107 miles. The re-trenched line would be only 70 miles long, and the enemy's motive was instantly guessed by many on the British staff. If the prisoner's statement was true, the enemy would not merely straighten his line and save troops. He would dislocate an important part of the great British offensive, which most British staff officers knew to be impending at Arras. "I am afraid it is a very clever thing the Germans have done," was General White's comment. But even he was unaware that the secondary offensive by the French Northern Group might be similarly affected.



*A—Immediate retirement.*

*B—Expected final retirement.*

<sup>28</sup> These officers were then under the impression that Pys and Miraumont had been seized by the British. They would in that case have been betraying no useful information.

Needless to say, the front-line troops were cognisant of no such considerations. They were aware only of one almost incredible fact—the German Army was with drawing! “Going for a walk in Bapaume to-morrow?” said an officer of the I Anzac intelligence staff to his astonished mess-fellows as they gathered for the evening meal. Among the reserve companies of battalions in the front line as they buckled on their kit in response to the sudden order to take the places of their advancing front-line companies, and among the reserve battalions ordered to furnish carrying parties and to be prepared for an immediate advance, the excitement was intense. The depression of the long winter’s struggle began to vanish like mists breaking beneath the sun. But the excitement was probably nowhere so great as in the billets of the 13th Light Horse Regiment, when, shortly before midnight, it was ordered to prepare to carry out for the first time its proper function—“special patrol duty” ahead of the corps.<sup>26</sup> One squadron was to be collected and to be held ready at dawn, on the old Bapaume road at Pozières, a couple of miles behind the front. In spite of the excitement and even without the suggestion which came at once from army headquarters—all troops were determined to look out for mines and other traps.

Owing to the fog there was a long wait before the first reports came back from patrols. Those of the 3rd and 5th Brigades were to have gone out at 6.30 p.m.,<sup>27</sup> but in the sector of the 3rd Brigade special shelter was afforded by several old saps running from the Australian trenches into The Maze; and, without waiting for dark, the 9th (Queensland) Battalion, which held that sector and was in particularly fine fettle,<sup>28</sup> sent a patrol up one of these trenches. Led by Sergeant Malin,<sup>29</sup> the party crawled to the German wire, and,

<sup>26</sup> In accordance with instructions sent from General Gough’s headquarters.

<sup>27</sup> The 1st Division, however, ordered its artillery-fire to be advanced at 5.30 p.m., so as to allow patrols to issue safely.

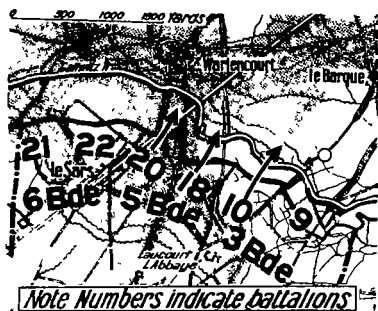
<sup>28</sup> It was shortly to have raided The Maze, and its raiding party was then training in a back area under Major Wilder-Neligan.

<sup>29</sup> Sgt. W. W. Malin, M.M. (No. 2759A; 9th Bn.). Electric power sawman; of Brisbane, b Stretton, Staffs, Eng., 22 Oct., 1886. (With him were L/Cpl. W. Griffiths and Privates B. G. King and H. Charlton. It was a patrol consisting of the same three, under Cpl. J. T. Molloy, that had reported the trenches quiet on the previous night. Griffiths, who died of illness on 30 Jan., 1919, belonged to Red Hill, Q’land; King, died of wounds on 23 Aug., 1918, to Gympie, Q’land; Charlton, killed in action on 8 Oct., 1917, to West WallSEND, N.S.W.; and Molloy, killed in action on 15 April, 1917, to Carrieton, S. Aust.)

hearing no sound, leapt into the trench. There dividing, it worked along the sides of the triangle listening and looking down at every dugout entrance, and presently met again at the farther side, having found nothing more dangerous than a black cat which bolted from one deserted entrance. By 7 o'clock this patrol had returned and telephoned that no Germans had been found.<sup>30</sup>

The sister battalion (10th, South Australia) and the two front-line battalions of the 5th (New South Wales) Brigade near the Butte were faced by the wide mud-field of No-Man's Land, and were much slower in obtaining the news, as were the other five brigades,<sup>31</sup> which had not received the orders till about 5.30. The 3rd and 5th Brigades, however, arranged that, if the front was reported clear, their front-line companies should advance together at 8.30 p.m. The 6th Brigade, farther left, would if possible act similarly. But at 8.28 no word had arrived from any other patrol. General Bennett of the 3rd Brigade therefore sent on his 9th Battalion to occupy The Maze. It was not until 9 that the 5th Brigade, on his left, received any word from the silent white blanket of fog through which the patrols were groping. Then news arrived that, except for an occasional shot, the patrols of the 5th Brigade had met with no resistance. At 10.20 the front-line battalions of that brigade and the 10th Battalion on their right were ordered to move steadily forward, taking every precaution against mines and traps. By 1.30 these troops were in or beyond the old support line of the enemy on their front, except at the inner flank of their two brigades (3rd and 5th), where fire from some party of the enemy temporarily prevented their junction.<sup>32</sup>

Yet these advanced troops had not so far found touch with any solid enemy, and on their



<sup>30</sup> The message was in simple code: "Bon, bon, très bon!"

<sup>31</sup> The forward brigades were (left to right). 6th, 5th, 3rd, 2nd, 12th (being relieved by 15th), 8th, 14th.

<sup>32</sup> This held up the right of the 5th Brigade (18th Bn.). The advance of the left battalion (20th) also had been delayed through the driving back of one of its patrols by some German trench-mortar stationed beyond.

left the situation was still more vague. The patrols of the 6th (Victoria) Brigade had simply vanished into the dark. Despite the impatience of the acting-brigadier, Colonel Forbes,<sup>33</sup> it was not until 11.40 that definite word came back from "Gallwitz Trench" that a patrol of the 21st Battalion had met some Germans who were throwing flares, and, after an exchange of bombs, had returned.

To General Gellibrand, the acting-commander of the 2nd Division, the apparent slowness of that division, and especially of his own brigade, to obtain urgently needed information was almost intolerable. The truth was that no force could pass in an instant from the ingrained habits of trench-warfare to the skilled practice of semi-open warfare. Throughout this stage almost every superior was fretting at what appeared to be the slowness and lack of enterprise of his subordinates. Army headquarters was urging speed upon corps, corps upon division, division upon brigade, brigade upon battalion, and battalion upon its companies. Early in the night Gellibrand personally took forward to both his brigade commanders the order from corps laying down the objectives, and insisted that, even if some opposition was encountered, those objectives must be occupied. The report from Gallwitz Trench arriving at this juncture gave evidence that it was held only by a handful of men placed there to make a show. Orders were at once given that at 1 a.m. the 21st and 22nd Battalions must each send forward two companies to enter it.<sup>34</sup> The companies advanced in extended order; the right of the 22nd found itself unable to cross the thick uncut wire-entanglement protecting the old German position, and sent back for duck-boards to lay across it; but, by 4.26, both battalions reported that they were in Gallwitz Trench. No enemy was in contact with them, and they were ordered to complete their night's task by reconnoitring and encircling with posts the ruined village of Warlencourt beyond the bottom of the valley.<sup>35</sup>

Thus on the left half of the Anzac front the Germans had withdrawn almost entirely out of touch; but on the right

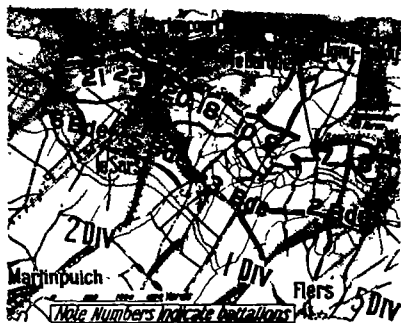
<sup>33</sup> Forbes was commanding the 6th Brigade in the absence of General Gellibrand; his own battalion, the 21st, was at different times temporarily under command of Major B. O. C. Duggan, Captain F. Sale, and Major H. A. Crowther.

<sup>34</sup> The support companies of these battalions had both arrived at the front half-an-hour before. The support battalion (24th) was ordered to send two companies to bring up bombs.

<sup>35</sup> The 21st lost two junior officers killed during the patrol operations, Lieut. T. E. Cozens (of Wangaratta, Vic.) and Lieut. T. L. Murray (of Trafalgar, Vic.).



The 8th Battalion also had entered the trench with little or no opposition. By daybreak the 2nd Brigade was in touch with the 3rd, 300 yards beyond The Maze. Some Germans with a machine-gun—possibly those who had previously prevented the junction of the 3rd and 5th Brigades—had been located beside the “Blue Cut” road to Le Barque.



<sup>36</sup> The 7th and 8th.

<sup>26</sup> The 7th and 8th.  
<sup>27</sup> Major J. W. Hopkins, M.C.: 7th Bn. Warehouseman, of Moonee Ponds and Birdwoodton, Vic.; b. Fitzroy, Vic., 1 March, 1890.

They were rushed by a party of bombers and rifle-bombers of the 10th Battalion under Lieutenant Whiteford.<sup>38</sup> Whiteford was killed, but the Germans ran off into the fog, and at 6 a.m. the two brigades joined on their objective. The previous No-Man's Land, scattered thickly over with the bodies of English, Scots, and Australians killed in the autumn and winter,<sup>39</sup> now lay behind them. The old German support trenches, which the Australians occupied, afforded good shelter, although the dugout entrances had been systematically blown in. The troops quickly discovered the few deep chambers which could be used. Traps set by the Germans were usually obvious—a bayonet sticking in the wall, with a hidden bomb attached, or a loose board in the floor designed to explode a mine on contact—and were permanently avoided by all troops even without warning.<sup>40</sup>

On the extreme right of the I Anzac front patrols of the 14th Brigade (5th Division) found that the Germans had not receded an inch, their trenches around Le Transloy being fully garrisoned. The enemy's retirement was therefore evidently pivoting on that point, his line to the south of it being unaltered, but that to the north swinging back like a door on its hinge. The Australian troops following him were not yet clear of the area of muddy shell-craters, but the change and relief of advancing into more open ground were great, and close ahead lay the comparatively green valley and upslope on which the villages and their surrounding trees were not wholly destroyed. Except on the right, the resistance so far encountered had obviously come only from some rear party with a machine-gun or from flare-throwers strung out along trenches to keep up the appearance of occupation. There was evidence, however, that strong rear parties of the enemy lay not far ahead of the Anzac centre. Two captured Germans<sup>41</sup> belonging to the party of flare-throwers, which had been sent out to make a show in Bayonet Trench, said that the rear

<sup>38</sup> Lieut C. G. Whiteford, 10th Bn. Crane driver; of Peterborough, S. Aust.; b. Mile End, S. Aust., 1895. Killed in action, 25 Feb., 1917.

<sup>39</sup> Especially of the 7th Australian Infantry Brigade. The bodies were buried during the next few days by parties of Australian infantry.

<sup>40</sup> A few Australians were caught: later, in "Barley Trench," several were killed by a mine apparently operated by a loose wire on the floor of the trench. A pencil, picked up by another man, exploded under his eyes.

<sup>41</sup> Of the I/5 Foot Guard.

party was stationed at Luisenhof Farm, but that, like their own, it had instructions in case of attack to fall back on the III Battalion, which was holding Le Barque.

On the Anzac left, however, although the infantry had reached the objective set by Birdwood, there was no word or sign of the enemy. At 5.15, therefore, Gellibrand set his brigades two further urgent tasks—to find if the Germans were, first, in the bottom of the valley, either at Warlencourt or in the Le Barque switch; or, second, on the upslope beyond, in “Malt Trench,” which climbed from Le Barque to a promontory of the plateau, close in front of Loupart Wood.<sup>42</sup> At 7.50, suspecting that the enemy might have withdrawn too far for the infantry to obtain touch, Gellibrand directed Colonel Forbes of the 6th Brigade to send out Major McIntyre’s<sup>43</sup> squadron of the 13th Light Horse Regiment,<sup>44</sup> which had been ordered to brigade headquarters at Martinpuich. At 9.50, when the squadron reached him, Forbes decided to wait for the reports of his own infantry patrols, which were then out in the required direction. By noon he knew that his infantry had found Warlencourt empty and had established posts all round it, and that a patrol which attempted to climb the hill to Malt Trench had been fired on by a machine-gun from that trench. This enemy, however, might be merely a rear party left behind to harass the pursuers. The cavalry was therefore ordered to hold itself ready for a reconnaissance at dawn next morning. In the meanwhile, the question whether the enemy was really holding Malt Trench, both on the right, down near Le Barque, and on the left, on this bastion of the plateau, would be thoroughly probed.

On the morning of February 25th the country was again shrouded in thick fog. To attempt to ascertain by air patrols how far the Germans had withdrawn was useless, but fairly definite news had at last been obtained—its source being the two men of the 5th Foot Guard captured in Bayonet Trench. One of these said that the Germans were still

**Regaining  
touch with  
the enemy**

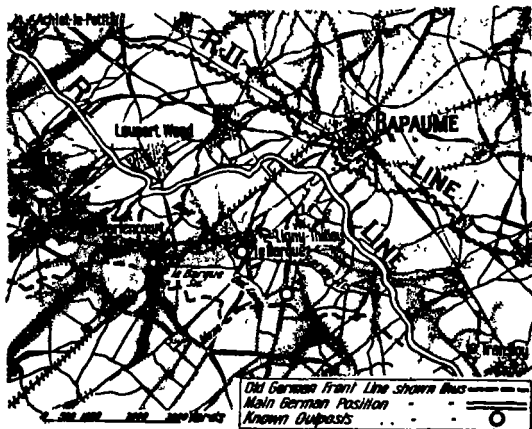
<sup>42</sup> See Vol. XII, plate 290.

<sup>43</sup> Major H. McIntyre, 1 Anzac L.H. Regt. Farmer; of Murrumbidgee, Vic.; b. Port Campbell, Vic., 22 Jan., 1877. Killed in action, 1 Oct., 1917.

<sup>44</sup> The squadron had been placed under the 2nd Division.

holding, as their front line, the position that had served as their second line during the winter—the strongly wired double-trench running from Le Transloy along the slope before Bapaume and thence round the edge of the plateau in front of Loupart Wood. This was known to the British as the "Loupart-Le Transloy Line,"<sup>45</sup> and to the Germans as the "R.I."<sup>46</sup> position. Behind it, across the plateau in rear of Loupart Wood, skirting Bapaume, and thence south-eastward along the summit of the ridge, ran the old second reserve position, "R.II," which the enemy was said to be now holding as his second line.<sup>47</sup> According to one of the prisoners, the Germans intended to reach the Hindenburg Line on March 25th, the retirement being carried out in a number of stages. Rear parties were said to be still situated between the Australian troops and the enemy's main front. The positions of these parties in one regimental sector were definitely indicated—in Luisenhof Farm, and the ruins of Le Barque; the general line of them would obviously lie in the cluster of three ruined villages—Le Barque, Ligny-Thilloy, and Thilloy—and along the intermediate trench system (two switch lines traversing the low-lying re-entrant in the R.I line and crossing one another like the shafts of a capital X on the nearer side of Le Barque).

At 10 a.m., about the time when this information was obtained, the orders from I Anzac Corps to its three



<sup>45</sup> It was also named variously in different sectors: near Le Transloy it included "Sun," "Meteor," and "Atom" Trenches. South of the Bapaume road it became "Till Trench" and "Till Support." West of the road, the front trench was known as "Warlencourt Trench," and the support as "Gréville's Line" ("Gréville's Trench" was a different work running towards Pys).

<sup>46</sup> Possibly the "First Reserve" line.

<sup>47</sup> This line included the defences of Bapaume.

divisions in the line were issued.<sup>48</sup> The right division—5th—was ordered to push out patrols to feel the intermediate trench (in that sector, "Barley Trench") ahead of it. The centre division—1st—was to occupy the trenches which crossed one another near Le Barque and thence send patrols into the village. The left division—2nd—was to occupy Warlencourt and thence to probe the intermediate trench (in that sector, Malt Trench). In forwarding the 1st Division's order, Colonel Blamey added that advantage should be taken of the fog to screen this movement.<sup>49</sup>

The first brigade to carry out the order was again the 3rd, which had established itself on the flat foot-hill beyond The Maze. General Bennett ordered the 9th and 10th Battalions to advance at 1 o'clock, under cover of the mist, and seize the crossed trenches. A company of the 9th which throughout the drizzly night had been digging a communication trench to The Maze was hurriedly brought up and lined out from the battalion's most advanced post,<sup>50</sup> and two companies of the 10th came up on its flank. But at 12.20, while this movement was in progress, the fog cleared. The German artillery, observing the assembly, brought down its fire upon the area, and, when the line rose and advanced,<sup>51</sup> four or five machine-guns from different parts of the landscape ahead rattled out. A number of officers and men were hit. With shell-bursts spouting constantly from all parts of the muddy slope down which they advanced, the Queenslanders and South Australians moved at a quick marching pace and, as they did so, caught sight of a few small groups of German machine-gunners and snipers holding the nearest trench, "Oat Lane." When the Australians were about 50 yards away these ran.<sup>52</sup> A few were shot, but the majority fled into the wood fringing Le Barque, the men of the 10th streaming after them.

<sup>48</sup> The 4th Division had by then gone out into rest. It is probable that the full information from the captured Germans had not been received when the order was issued; their statements were telegraphed to the divisions in instalments between noon and 2 p.m.

<sup>49</sup> Parties of the 2nd Brigade had attacked Luisenhof Farm under cover of the fog, but found it empty; a German post had been there, but had already withdrawn.

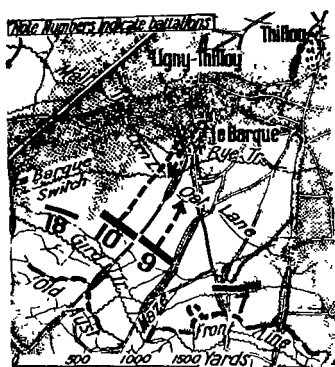
<sup>50</sup> Near "Bank Trench," 300 yards beyond The Maze. The other company of the 9th was not up in time to take part in the first advance, but arrived shortly after to support it.

<sup>51</sup> The 10th Battalion was in two waves, the 9th in one.

<sup>52</sup> Lieut. R. M. White, himself a small man, chased and took prisoner two men of the 5th Guard Grenadier Regiment, who, when he was within ten yards, dropped on their knees and held up their hands.

This advance was the nearest approach to open warfare that most of those who took part had yet experienced.<sup>53</sup> A German battery commander<sup>54</sup> has since written that it was obvious on these days that "Tommy was entirely strange to the war of movement; the result was heavy losses for him." It is certain that both sides were hampered by inexperience.<sup>55</sup> But in the new freedom of their conditions the spirits of the men were steadily rising in spite of losses. The 10th actually crossed the south-eastern end of Malt Trench and entered the outskirts of Le Barque. Here the men gradually recognised that they had gone too far, and for three-quarters of an hour streamed back up the road to "Oat" and "Wheat" Trenches. The German artillery bombarded these positions with real severity, its fire continuing throughout the afternoon on both 1st and 2nd Divisions. The heavy artillery, which was asked to suppress the German batteries, fired a few shots, but ceased upon finding that the enemy batteries were out of range. As a result of the German bombardment, a second company of the 9th, which came up late under Captain Knightley, was for a time held up. Eventually, it reached Oat Lane, as did a company of the 7th on its right, and at 5 o'clock patrols were sent out, as ordered, towards Le Barque. German snipers, shooting from the village, hampered their movement, but they crossed "Rye Trench" and worked round a sunken road east of that village to a point half-way to Ligny-Thilloy.

Farther to the left the commander of the 5th Australian Brigade (2nd Division), whose patrols had been fired on by machine-guns from the westward continuation of the

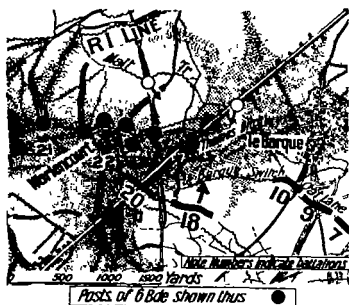


<sup>53</sup> Only a small proportion could remember the fighting of 25 April, 1915, at Anzac.

<sup>54</sup> Captain Georg von Kutzleben, historian of the 1st Guard Res. F.A. Regt.

<sup>55</sup> Colonel C. H. Elliott, in the history of the 12th Battalion (p. 236) records that he found one of his Lewis-gun posts allowing Germans to walk about with impunity only 600 yards distant, in the belief that they were "too far away" to fire at. The German battery commander remarks that the German infantry, also, had to accustom itself to use its rifles (*History of the 1st Guard Res. Field Art. Regt.*, p. 149).

same trench,<sup>56</sup> had intended that his front-line companies should advance simultaneously with the 3rd Brigade. Finding, however, that the 3rd Brigade had already acted, he sent his own line forward at 2.30. The 18th and 20th Battalions, moving in artillery formation under fairly heavy shell-fire, reached Le Barque Switch. At that stage they were faced with the fire of several machine-guns; further advance over the open would obviously entail many casualties. But along the bottom of the valley ran a dry watercourse, the "Thames Ditch," which could be reached by men dribbled in twos and threes beside the bank of the Bapaume road. In this creek-bed the 18th Battalion established a firing-line, 400 to 500 yards from Malt Trench. The 20th Battalion, advancing on either side of the road, managed on the left to reach the bank of the Warlencourt-Le Barque road, where it gained touch with the line of posts already established by the 6th Brigade around Warlencourt. All the nearer intermediate trenches had thus been gained, except towards the right of the corps front, where patrols of the 15th Brigade, pushing forward from Stormy and Sunray Trenches, were stopped by a machine-gun 400 yards short of their objective.<sup>57</sup>



German records make it clear that, yielding to the vehemence of the 3rd Brigade's attack, the German rear-guard parties in front of Le Barque actually fell back on a line beyond that village, which thus for the time being lay open to occupation.

**German account of the withdrawal**

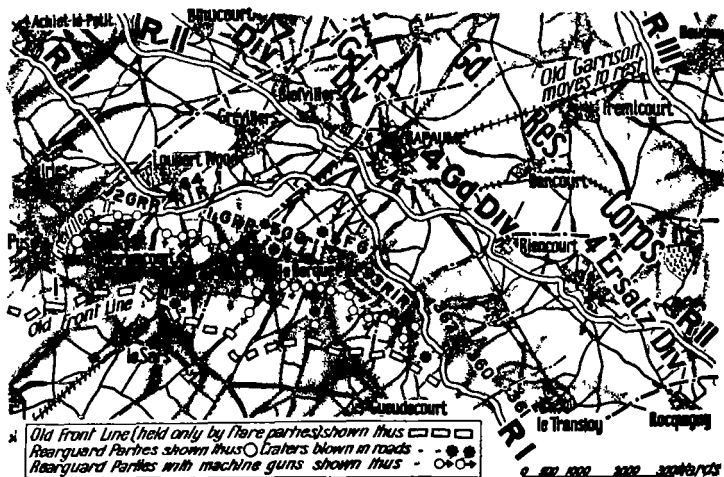
It is convenient at this point to describe the German movements during the first few days of the withdrawal, leaving, however, certain vital particulars, then hidden from the British, to be explained in *Chapter V*. As prisoners stated, preparations for a withdrawal had long been in progress, but had as far as possible been kept secret from the troops. On the walls of their rest-billets, however, there had appeared mysterious crosses and circles in yellow paint. Deep diggings were observed at cross-roads and wells; it gradually became known to the resting units that all these places,

<sup>56</sup> Here known as the "Le Barque Switch."

<sup>57</sup> Known, in that sector, as "Barley Trench."

including the buildings in which they slept, had been mined ready for blowing up. The French inhabitants were being cleared from a large area, leave stopped, letters censored, and, between the Hindenburg Line and the front, three long lines of trench and barbed-wire hurried towards completion—the R.I line on the Bapaume slope, R.II fringing (in that sector) the crest, and R.III (or the "Beugny-Ytres" Line) across the country three miles behind Bapaume.

The present retirement, which the British assumed to be a preordained part of the great plan of withdrawal, was (as will be explained in *Chapter V*) actually not so. It was to end at the R.I line. On February 19 the officers of the 1st Guard Reserve Division's artillery had been informed that their batteries were to be moved behind this line, and the movement was carried out the same night.<sup>88</sup> At 1 a.m. on the 23rd the infantry garrison left its front line, after first attempting to blow up all deep dugouts in the area forward of that which would be held by the rear-guard. About twenty men were left in each regimental sector to make a show of occupation until daylight. In rear, earlier in the night, the support battalion of each



regiment had occupied the R.I line with a full garrison. Farther back, in Bapaume for example, were the reserve battalions which now became the close supports. The troops from the old front line simply passed through these and continued on to the rest area. Nearest to the British lay the rear-guard parties, usually a section or two of troops and a machine-gun, with orders to check the British pursuit and to inflict loss, but to withdraw when seriously attacked. The German front was thus for the moment more strongly and alertly held than at normal times.

<sup>88</sup> The batteries withdrew from advanced positions about Loupart Wood and Gréville to less exposed positions near the same places, or farther back, in the neighbourhood of the R.II line north-east of Bapaume. The observation-posts were thenceforth in trees in Loupart Wood and in the houses of Gréville.





7. MOUTH OF A DUGOUT AT THE MAZE, BLOWN UP BY THE GERMANS  
BEFORE WITHDRAWAL

*Aust War Memorial Official Photo No E212  
Taken on 28th February, 1917*

*To face p 80*



8 LOUPART WOOD (LEFT) AND TREES OF GRÉVILLERS (RIGHT)

(Photographed from Le Sars, 22nd May, 1917)

*Aust War Memorial Official Photo No E488*

*To face p 81*

The order for this withdrawal had been issued before the last two advances by the 45th Battalion in Stormy Trench—indeed, the 45th's second assault had been launched only an hour and a half before the German garrison was due to retire. The silence of the prisoners then captured is evidence of a steadfastness more than once exhibited by men of the 4th Ersatz Division in spite of the reputed lowness of its morale; and the failure to counter-attack was also deliberate—the trench was due to be abandoned, and its loss an hour earlier did not then endanger any adjoining position. One precaution was taken—the battalion holding the trenches next to the lost section stayed on a little longer to deceive their opponents, and then retired unnoticed. In this the fog was of great assistance. "Through the rain and mist," says the regimental historian of the 5th Guard Grenadier Regiment, which withdrew from The Maze, "the evacuation of the front line went off smoothly and without loss." The destruction of dugouts had not been quite so thorough as the German staff probably believed or intended,<sup>59</sup> but the removal or destruction of papers was remarkably thorough: it was not until March 13 that any document of value was found on this part of the front.<sup>60</sup>

At 2.30 a.m. on the 23rd large craters were blown in the road leading through Le Barque and Thillois, and on the main Bapaume road, rendering them impassable by wheeled vehicles. The forward area was now occupied only by the few men with orders to "throw flares" and "make sounds of activity on the wire-entanglements"—and even these troops were in some cases from a quarter to half-a-mile behind the old front line. The German artillery was ordered to keep its barrage line in front of the old position as long as it was possible to do so. At day-break the flare-throwers were withdrawn, but an observing party remained throughout the 23rd in "Bank Trench" (on the knuckle east of The Maze) and between 8 and 10.20 there were sent back several mistaken reports that Australian patrols had penetrated The Maze and the adjoining part of Bayonet Trench. It was for this reason that the German artillery laid its fire on parts of its old front line.

Scouting parties sent out by the Germans on February 24 found to their surprise that these trenches were empty, the supposed intruders having apparently evacuated them. On the suggestion of the commander of its rear-guard, the 4th Guard Division sent out again patrols of 15-20 men under an officer, one in each regimental sector, to reoccupy the front line, and, if possible, ascertain the position. It was these which, going out at 5 p.m. on the 24th, found the Australians beginning to flow into the old German lines, and were responsible for the occasional resistance offered on the 1st Australian Division's front that night.<sup>61</sup>

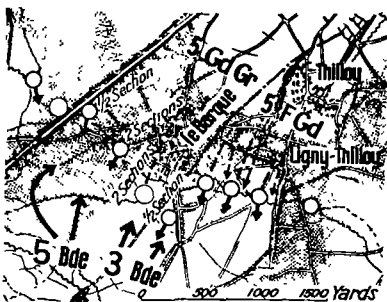
The thrust of the 3rd and 5th Australian Brigades on February 25 had pressed chiefly upon the 5th Guard Grenadier (4th Guard Division), whose rear parties held the Bapaume road to (and including) Le Barque. They amounted to seven sections of infantry

<sup>59</sup> In many dugouts only the entrances were blown in, in a few the charges failed to explode.

<sup>60</sup> See p. 120.

<sup>61</sup> Their orders were to throw flares from the old front line, but to retire if attacked. The patrol of the 5th Foot Guard Regiment in Bayonet Trench gradually retired before the 2nd Australian Brigade, until 4 a.m., when it was entirely withdrawn.

and three machine-guns in all, disposed as shown in the marginal sketch. East and west of them respectively were similar parties of the 5th Foot Guard and 1st Guard Reserve Regiments.<sup>62</sup> This day the German artillery was delighted with the targets offered to it, not only in the shape of advancing infantry, but of guns and their crews coming forward into positions in which—although obviously they only realised it when fire was opened on them—they were open to view of the German observers. The German artillery, pounding these targets and expecting every minute the hated counter-battery fire of the British artillery, was surprised to find that on this day no such fire came.<sup>63</sup> It was not until this stage, much later than they themselves had expected, that the Germans began to feel the pressure of the pursuit. Their rear parties, as has been mentioned, were driven from Le Barque, and the Guard Reserve Corps accordingly decided to strengthen its rear-guard in that sector. The 5th Guard Grenadier sent thither an additional forty men with a machine-gun, and it was reported that by 4.15 p.m. these had reoccupied (German accounts say "re-taken") the abandoned village. The neighbouring 5th Foot Guard re-entered Barley Trench, retired again on the advance of an Australian patrol, but reoccupied the trench when the patrol was shelled out.



The slight nature of the resistance thus far encountered was evident to the Australian leaders, but patrols found great difficulty in making headway,<sup>64</sup> especially on the left, which was overlooked by the enemy from his bastion in front of Loupart Wood. Gellibrand, therefore, again pressed by Corps Headquarters, decided to test, by a determined advance, his

**German  
resistance in  
Malt Trench**

<sup>62</sup> The 5th Foot Guard belonged to the 4th Guard Division, the 1st G.R.R. to the 1st Guard Res Division.

<sup>63</sup> The Germans presently guessed—probably through statements by prisoners—that the British believed that the Germans were retiring beyond Bapaume, in which case the German artillery would have withdrawn from all known battery positions. This did not really account for the silence of the British artillery. The batteries which the British believed to have withdrawn *had* withdrawn. The British silence was probably due rather to uncertainty concerning the action to be taken, and the need for advancing batteries. The uncertainty soon ended. The 1 Anzac "heavies" (now the 14th and 23rd Heavy Artillery Groups) fired on Feb. 23 725 rounds; Feb. 24, 486; Feb. 25, 680; Feb. 26, 1,789; Feb. 27, 2,786; Feb. 28, 2,207. On the 26th many guns were being moved up, mostly on the Decauville railways, and on the 27th (a fine day) they were registering, with aeroplane observation, the new German front line.

<sup>64</sup> Apparently in consequence of this slowness, Gellibrand ordered the relief of the 6th Brigade by the 7th to be postponed 24 hours. He afterwards cancelled this order.

belief that Malt Trench, the last, and most important, of the enemy's intermediate defences on his front, was held only by similar rear parties. Such action could not be materially assisted by the artillery, some of whose batteries were engaged in moving up on the Decauville railway or in registering from their new positions. Outright attack was not strictly in conformity with the orders from the corps commander, which enjoined the sending out of patrols;<sup>65</sup> but the suspicion that the troops were really being held up by a mere handful of scattered machine-gunners strained the patience of most commanders, and Gellibrand's determined methods throughout this stage received warm approval from his superiors. It was in this spirit that he sent to the 5th and 6th Brigades at 2.30 the following order:

The divisional commander desires the line of Malt and Gamp Trenches to be occupied by dusk unless proved to be strongly held by the enemy. He hopes to hear of the occupation of this line by 5.30 p.m.

This amounted to an order to both brigades to test Malt Trench by some form of attack promptly and with energy. Nevertheless darkness fell and the hours passed without bringing Gellibrand the news he desired. About 9 o'clock he heard that at 6.10 the men of the 5th Brigade, attacking Malt Trench on the flats near the Bapaume road, were in front of the German entanglement trying to find a way through, and that the 6th Brigade, attacking the same trench on the height in front of Loupart Wood, were held up on the left, and, on the right were coming back disorganised after an attempt to penetrate the enemy's wire.

What had happened in the 5th Brigade was that, as soon as the two advanced companies of the 18th Battalion left



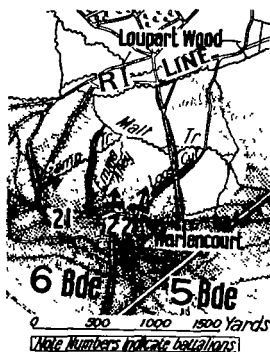
Position of 5th and 6th Brigades before Malt Trench.

<sup>65</sup> The order from I Anzac to the 2nd Division on the previous evening had been to send forward strong patrols and "occupy without hesitation" any "ground found unoccupied by the enemy." At 10 a.m. on the 25th Gellibrand had been ordered to "send patrols forward to clear up situation at Malt Trench." In the afternoon General White telephoned to him asking if the light horse had been sent forward. Gellibrand replied that the 5th and 6th Brigades had been ordered forthwith to occupy Malt and Gamp Trenches as a basis for operations against the R.I. line at Loupart Wood.

Thames Ditch to cross the 500 yards to Malt Trench, slightly up the farther slope, several machine-guns broke out and, grazing the slope with well-directed fire, quickly drove the line to shelter in craters. The troops tried to advance from one crater to another, but the casualties were heavy. In the left company, only ninety-eight strong, a third of the men were hit. The snipers in the enemy's rear posts were taking no chances; if a wounded man moved, he was fired on. Of eight stretcher-bearers in one company, seven were hit and four killed. The troops had therefore lain in shell-holes until dusk, when it became possible to trickle them forward to the embankment of the Warlencourt-Le Barque road, which ran diagonally close in front of the enemy's chief strong-point, at the crossing of Malt Trench and the Bapaume road. Here they lay, seventy yards from their objective and close to the German wire.



The 6th Brigade had arranged to attack with two companies of each of its front-line battalions—the 21st (left) and 22nd (right). To reach Malt Trench on the Loupart height, these troops must climb for half-a-mile the slope above Warlencourt. Up this ran two communication trenches and three sunken roads which crossed one another as shown in the marginal sketch. The greater part of the slope was sheltered from rifle-fire. The two companies of the right battalion (22nd) were to be led by Captain Cull,<sup>66</sup> who, during the afternoon, had made a most gallant reconnaissance of the German wire in front of Malt Trench by the simple method of walking straight up the hill to it, trusting that the Germans would imagine that he had lost his way, and that in the hope of securing a prisoner



<sup>66</sup> Capt W. A. Cull, 22nd Bn Coachbuilder; of St. Kilda, Vic., b. Sandford, Vic., 31 July, 1894. Died, 29 July, 1939.

they would let him come near.<sup>67</sup> He had found the German entanglement uncut, and, when given the task of attacking, asked if there was to be artillery support. The answer was: "Not a shell." Cull protested that he considered the wire impassable until cut by artillery-fire, but an instruction was telephoned from brigade headquarters "that the attack must be launched at all costs at once." He therefore led his company to the jumping-off point. The Germans, doubtless stirred by the attack of the 5th Brigade lower down, were now sweeping the 800 yards of No-Man's Land with machine-guns, while their artillery barrage was falling behind Cull's troops. No sign was seen of the other companies which were to co-operate, and in these circumstances Cull again asked if the attack should not at least be assisted by artillery. The answer again was: "Attack at all costs."<sup>68</sup> He accordingly told his scouts to move ahead of the advancing troops and endeavour to discover any passages through the entanglement. The rest of the company followed in line of sections, each section in file so that it might slip through any such opening.

The fusillade had fortunately subsided before the advance, but flares were rising in sheaves. As the line topped the hill, the Germans were seen in their trench and evidently detected the Victorians, who, at fifty yards from the entanglement, were met with fire from machine-guns and rifles. Cull ordered them to lie in shell-holes and wait for the report of the scouts. No report, however, came, and Cull, in the belief that what was required by his commanders was a sacrifice of himself and his troops to secure some advantage elsewhere, gave the order to charge the trench over the enemy wire. The impetus of his own rush carried him over the first row of stakes, but he became entangled in the second. He had time to see his men struggling in the first, when his hip was shattered by a bomb. Lieutenant Corne<sup>69</sup> and a private named Martin<sup>70</sup> gallantly crawled under the wire and tried to extricate him, but Corne was at once hit. Most of the remnant of the company fell back. The second company of

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<sup>67</sup> With him was Private S. Shearn, officers' cook for Cull's company.

<sup>68</sup> The account here given is that of Captain Cull himself.

<sup>69</sup> Lieut. W. Corne, 22nd Bn. Baker; of Melbourne; b. Norwich, Eng., 1893 killed in action, 26 Feb., 1917.

<sup>70</sup> L/Cpl. C. Martin, M.M. (No. 1109, 22nd Bn.). Blacksmith; of South Melbourne; b. Footscray, Vic., 1892. Killed in action, 3 May, 1917.

the 22nd, though not in touch with Cull, had also attacked, and twenty of its men, under a sergeant, finding themselves opposite an opening in the entanglement, entered an unoccupied section of Malt Trench, but were shortly afterwards driven out by machine-gun fire.<sup>71</sup>

The left battalion (21st) had attempted to work up "Gamp Trench," a muddy avenue of communication, but had been stopped at an open road-crossing by machine-gun fire. Both battalions were exhausted and were forthwith relieved by a sister unit, the 24th.<sup>72</sup> The operation threw no light on the enemy's strength or position, for the reason that the loss of leaders and the shock to the troops rendered it impossible to obtain a coherent account of the action.

It was, however, evident that the I Anzac Corps was in holts with German covering-posts capable of offering stiff resistance. This had also been ascertained by air-observers, who, early in the afternoon, had at last been able to take advantage of a break in the fog to locate the enemy's true line. By flying low and attracting fire, they observed fair numbers of Germans in the R.I line and also the rear-guard parties in front of the 5th Brigade where Malt Trench crossed the Bapaume road, and, on the right, near the pivot of the enemy's movement. They drew no fire from the ruins and woods of Le Barque, Ligny-Thilloy, and Thilloy, and therefore reported them empty,<sup>73</sup> but, as patrols of Australian infantry were afterwards fired on from these places, it was known that the report did not represent the position at dusk. In front of the II Corps a strong German outpost was seen in "Gréville's Trench." The airmen's reports

**Further news  
and orders**

<sup>71</sup> Three of Cull's men entered the trench at another point and captured several Germans, but were, in their turn, surrounded and captured. Cull himself, wounded a second time and entangled in the wire, was also made prisoner, as were several of his men.

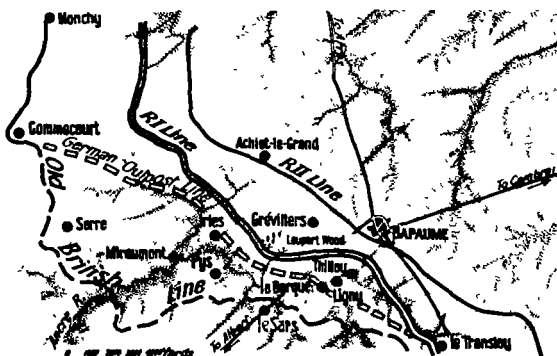
<sup>72</sup> Gellibrand believed that the positions facing the Australians were held by scattered posts only, with wide intervals between. He expressed the belief that, if a line of his infantry advanced up to the enemy's wire on a wide front, and those men who found themselves opposite gaps in the wire held up their hands, the rest of the line should be able to turn right or left and file in through those gaps—*provided that the enemy's machine-guns had first been silenced*. This condition, however, was not attained in any of the operations here described, and was not likely to be so; the haste of the preparation added other difficulties.

<sup>73</sup> It is probable that Le Barque was empty at the moment, in consequence of the 10th Battalion's attack.



confirmed the opinion already formed by the staff of the Fifth Army from prisoners' statements—that the Germans had fallen back "for the present" on a line from Gommecourt to Le Transloy, with a number of covering outposts. "The same information," it was noted, "has been obtained glibly from almost every prisoner."

Evidence that the enemy would retreat at an early date to the Hindenburg Line now



appeared to most British officers to be overwhelming. It was manifest that the prisoners of the 5th Foot Guard were themselves convinced of this. One of them said that he had heard his officers speak of the plans. The Germans, he said, intended to withdraw from trench-line to trench-line, but only after systematic destruction not merely of dugouts and cellars which might give shelter to their opponents, but of all houses that could be used for billets. Trees, he said, were being cut down to block the roads, and mine-craters blown at crossways, both before Bapaume and beyond it. The tower of its town-hall had been blown up<sup>74</sup>—he himself had been a member of the working party that laid the mines; most of the guns had withdrawn a week before, and the remainder had been firing continuously ever since. Part of his regiment had been set to dig trenches south of Bapaume, but had been specially told by their regimental commander to make the position just strong enough to hold for a few days.

Although the chief of the intelligence staff<sup>75</sup> was not yet fully convinced that the enemy would withdraw farther than the Bapaume heights, Sir Douglas Haig seems to have been

<sup>74</sup> This statement was inaccurate, but the prisoner evidently believed it.

<sup>75</sup> Brig.-Gen. J. Charteris, an officer of outstanding ability and intelligence

convinced of it.<sup>76</sup> Notwithstanding that the press of the Allies was officially encouraged to proclaim the retirement as due to the pressure of their armies<sup>77</sup>—a truer claim than its authors then realised—he himself regarded it as a clever and soldierly manœuvre, provided that, as he expected, it was to be “followed by a counter-attack or combined with a great offensive elsewhere.” The trick of tempting your enemy to follow and then striking him hard as he does so is older than even the Battles of Cannae and Hastings, and was consonant with tactics employed by the Germans themselves in the first weeks of the war. Consequently, from the early hours of the retreat the British Army was ordered to follow with caution. At conferences at Fifth Army Headquarters on February 25th and 26th, General Gough laid down for his corps commanders the principle that they must follow the enemy with mobile advanced guards working ahead of their main body—the advanced guards having the duty of driving back or capturing any isolated rear parties by manœuvring round their flanks. If, however, the enemy was met with in force, and well posted, he must not be seriously attacked until his position had been thoroughly reconnoitred and guns, ammunition, and a sufficient force of infantry brought up.

The army as a whole must not go forward in a straggling manner and lay itself open to well-prepared and heavy attacks by superior forces.

The main body with its artillery must, however, follow the advanced bodies as quickly as the necessary roads and railways had been pushed forward.

Although, therefore, the Fifth Army's part in the impending British offensive had been dislocated by the German withdrawal, Gough might have an opportunity of striking a blow somewhat similar to that previously intended, provided that the Germans stood fast long enough at any stage of their retirement. Thus, on the I Anzac front, although the Germans had abandoned all the first objectives of the intended offensive, they still held the Loupart bastion, at which the main blow of the Fifth Army's offensive was to have been delivered by the I Anzac and II Corps; and this

<sup>76</sup> He affirmed it on Feb. 26 at Calais. Two days later strong confirmation was obtained in the statement of prisoners that hutments beyond Péronne were being evacuated, aerodromes near Le Cateau and elsewhere shifted, the inhabitants of villages west of Cambrai and from part of that town itself removed.

<sup>77</sup> It was also directed that this should be incidentally emphasised in orders to the troops.

was the objective at which, at a conference held on the evening of the 25th,<sup>78</sup> it was now decided to strike.

The whole R.I line was, however, protected with strong belts of wire and could only be attacked after long bombardment and the digging of jumping-off trenches, and, as a first measure, the German outpost-positions in Gréville and Malt Trenches must be taken. The latter task would fall to the 2nd Australian Division, the former to the right division of the II Corps. These two divisions would subsequently dig the jumping-off trench and attack the Loupart position from two sides. The tasks of the other two Australian divisions in the line would for the present be comparatively minor ones—

that of the 5th, to make certain that the Germans were pivoting on Le Transloy, and to secure the intermediate trench (Barley Trench) on their front; and that of the 1st, to seize the three villages intervening between itself and the presumed enemy front line (R.I—in that part, "Till Trench"). It also might be called on to take a minor part on the right of the 2nd Australian Division in the Loupart offensive. As preliminary steps, the artillery was to be brought forward, and a plan of bombardment by the siege artillery at once initiated; the Bapaume road was to be repaired, and also, if possible, that through Flers, the light railways extended, and arrangements made for supplying the troops. But the first preliminary remained the seizure of Malt Trench.

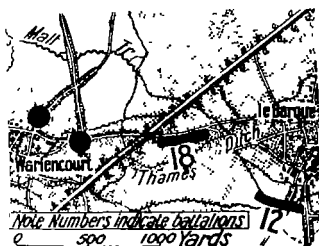


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No prisoners had yet been secured by the 2nd Australian Division. Its leaders had consequently little definite knowledge as to the position of the German posts until their troops were at grips with them. The 5th Brigade, however, was in holts

<sup>78</sup> At Fifth Army Headquarters. Generals White and Carruthers were present representing the I Anzac Corps.

with a centre of resistance where Malt Trench crossed the Bapaume road.<sup>79</sup> During the night of the 25th several unsuccessful attempts were made by bombing parties of the 18th Battalion to get through or under the entanglement which was holding them up. Finally, as the bank of the Warlencourt-Le Barque road would in daylight be enfiladed, the companies lining it were withdrawn to the Thames Ditch. On this day the artillery could give some assistance. Trench-mortars were brought up and, after certain delays, opened fire at 6.40 a.m. on February 26th, the artillery covering them with salvoes on Malt Trench. Some of the batteries, however, were still in process of being moved forward, and the weak fire from the remainder merely caused the German machine-guns to open.<sup>80</sup> The attack was therefore postponed until 1.30 p.m., when the 3rd Brigade would be attacking Le Barque. Both assaults were to be prepared for by two hours' bombardment.



*Australian posts:  
Warlencourt-Le Barque.*

The guns (says the diary of an Australian attached to the corps staff) were fairly busy from 11.30 onwards—but it was a scattered ineffective sort of bombardment at best.<sup>81</sup> About 1.30 it seemed to get heavier and then abruptly cease. . . . Some of the guns afterwards opened out again on some other target nearby, I believe.

There was no sign of infantry attack until about four or five minutes later several machine-guns began to chatter—I should say there were two ahead and two on the left of the attack, which was on Malt Trench between Le Barque and the Bapaume road. Then three flares went up. . . .

What had happened was that the 18th Battalion, in trying to get its men in twos and threes across the open to an assembly line 100 yards from Malt Trench, had a number hit, and the attack could not be delivered at 1.30. An effort was then made to launch it five minutes later. This attempt also

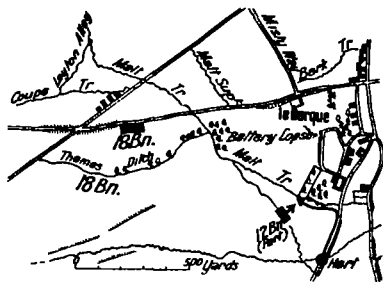
<sup>79</sup> See p. 84.

<sup>80</sup> The 18th Battalion reported that there appeared to be three machine-guns on its front, and the 20th reported that the wire in front of the German positions was twenty feet thick.

<sup>81</sup> A report from the 5th Brigade nevertheless said that the artillery-fire was good.

was postponed, officers on the spot being aware that the German wire had not been cut, most of the shells having overshot it. It was next arranged to attack at 3.40, if the entanglement had by then been cut, but, this not having been done, the attempt was again put off until after dark.

The intended attack by the 12th Battalion<sup>82</sup> (3rd Brigade) in the Le Barque sector was postponed for the same reason.<sup>83</sup> Instead, thirty-three men of the 12th Battalion, bombers and Lewis gunners, were sent forward under Lieutenant Hart<sup>84</sup> at 4.30 p.m. Their task was much easier than that of the 18th, inasmuch as a sunken road, Blue Cut, running from the battalion's position into the village, afforded shelter for their advance. They entered Malt Trench without opposition. A German detachment there fled, part into Le Barque, others into "Battery Copse." In spite of machine-gun fire from this copse, part of the 12th now advanced and occupied this section of Malt Trench. But the ruins of Le Barque were still held by the enemy, though in no great force.<sup>85</sup>



The 9th Battalion established posts on its south-eastern outskirts. Farther east the 7th and 8th (2nd Brigade) occupied part of Barley Trench; but to their right again a strong body of Germans in that trench still held up, as it had done for two days, the patrols and bombing parties of the 15th Brigade. On the extreme right, at the actual pivot, the enemy had strengthened his position by digging a new trench,<sup>86</sup> and bombing parties of the 8th Brigade could make no headway.

<sup>82</sup> The 12th (Tasmania) had been put in by General Bennett in order to relieve the 10th (South Australia) and to quicken the advance.

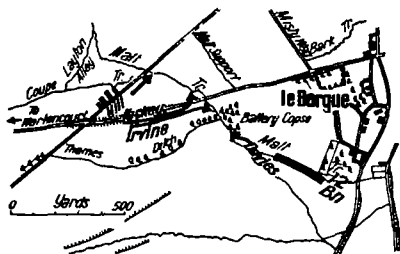
<sup>83</sup> Between 11.30 a.m. and 1.30 p.m. on Feb. 26 the 101st Howitzer Battery, A.F.A., fired 100 shells into the village, and the field-guns of the 3rd Battery had fired 250 shells—half of them high-explosive—at the adjoining end of Malt Trench.

<sup>84</sup> Lieut. G. H. C. Hart, 12th Bn. Pearler; of Broome, W. Aust.; b. Glasgow, Scotland, 10 March, 1881. Died of wounds, 25 April, 1918.

<sup>85</sup> Two small patrols of the 12th went into the village after dark.

<sup>86</sup> First shown in air-photographs of Feb. 25. It ruled off the angle between the German end of Sunray Trench and Atom Trench, and was named, by reason of its shape, "Boomerang Trench."

The 5th Brigade now adopted the tactics of its neighbour, the 3rd, and at dusk, when it became comparatively safe to creep along the road-banks, four bombing parties were sent out to attack Malt Trench as shown in the marginal sketch. Those under Lieutenants Davies<sup>87</sup> and Irvine<sup>88</sup> met no serious opposition, the Germans running from Battery Copse into the village. Lieutenant Hickey,<sup>89</sup> however, soon after entering



Malt Trench came against a barricade defended by enemy bombers.<sup>90</sup> These outranged the Australians: Hickey was wounded, and Irvine, who then took charge, could make no headway. Lieutenant Hill's<sup>91</sup> party, advancing along the ditch on the southern side of the Bapaume road, was checked by barbed-wire. Some of the party were crawling under the entanglement when thirty Germans, in a trench just north of the road, observed them, and crawled out to cut them off. These in their turn were seen by a Lewis gunner, Lance-Corporal Allsopp,<sup>92</sup> who, though the rest of the gun's crew were shot beside him and he himself was wounded in the eye, kept the Germans under fire while his mates withdrew.<sup>93</sup> Progress was thus checked for the night. At dawn, 5.30 a.m., the German position south-west of the Bapaume road was again bombarded by trench-mortars, and the German machine-guns on either side of the road were kept under fire

<sup>87</sup> Capt. E. L. Davies, M.C.; 18th Bn. Fat-stock buyer, of Essendon, Vic.; b. South Carlton, Vic., 10 Jan., 1888.

<sup>88</sup> Lieut. A. W. Irvine, M.C.; 18th Bn. Station overseer, of Sydney and Wanaaring, N.S.W., b. Wanaaring, 29 Nov., 1894.

<sup>89</sup> Lieut. P. F. Hickey, 18 Bn. School teacher; of Largs, N.S.W.; b. East Maitland, N.S.W., 28 Nov., 1886.

<sup>90</sup> It is recorded that Lieut. Irvine, who was then with Hickey, thought the bombs might be thrown by Hill's party, which was to meet Hickey. He shouted: "Steady on, Jack," but then saw a German aiming at him. Both fired, and missed.

<sup>91</sup> Capt. J. P. Hill, M.C.; 18th Bn. Auctioneer; of Homebush, N.S.W.; b. Stratford, Vic., 14 June, 1879.

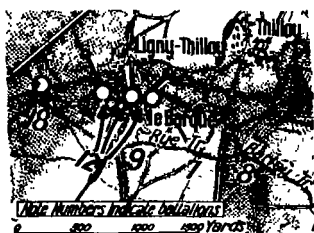
<sup>92</sup> Sgt. E. A. Allsopp, M.M. (No. 3621; 18th Bn) Labourer; of Auburn, N.S.W.; b. Forbes, N.S.W., 7 Nov., 1893. Died of wounds, 8 Oct., 1917.

<sup>93</sup> Three wounded and two dead men had been left under the wire, but a corporal named Nipperess (of Boggabri, N.S.W.; killed in action on 20 Sept., 1917) returned and carried out first the wounded and then the dead, so that the Germans might not discover, by badges or papers taken from the dead, what unit was opposed to them.

from Lewis guns, but an attempt to force the barricade was resisted as strongly as ever. About 6 o'clock, however, it was observed that the Germans were silent. The 17th Battalion, which had just relieved the 18th, found the barricade undefended, and, on hurrying to the Bapaume road, caught sight of the enemy withdrawing through a distant communication trench. A Lewis gun was turned on them, and many were hit. A sergeant of the 18th<sup>94</sup> crept beside the main road to "Malt Support Trench," 250 yards beyond Malt Trench, and found it empty save for a notice—"If we not will that you here, you was not here."

This sudden fading of opposition in front of the 5th Brigade was due to the driving back by the 3rd Brigade of the neighbouring posts in Le Barque. Acting

**Le Barque** on an order from General Bennett that that village must be taken before dawn, the 12th Battalion had sent three companies into the village, without artillery barrage, just as the day was breaking. Those on the centre and right, moving in an extended line through the ruins and over the open to the east, were presently seen and fired on by three or four small machine-gun posts stationed at wide intervals about half-way through the village and its outskirts.<sup>95</sup> The flash of the guns could be seen, but the men of the centre company, moving largely under shelter of ruined walls, continued to advance; very few were hit, as the excited Germans were firing high. When the Tasmanians were within 200 yards



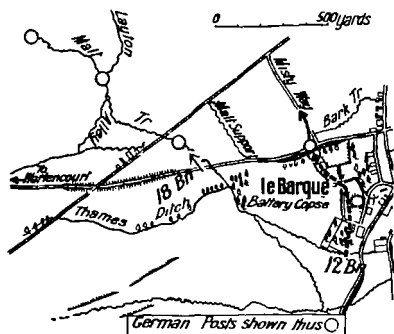
of them, they ran off through the village and the trees east of it, opened again from the houses along the road through Ligny-Thillois, and finally fell back on Thillois, high up the slope, and on some isolated outworks north of Le Barque. The Tasmanians, shooting and bombing, routed a few snipers from Ligny-Thillois—this task being completed by parties of the 11th Battalion which came up to relieve.

<sup>94</sup> Sgt. A. F. van den Berg (No. 667; 18th Bn.). Clerk; of Middelburg, Cape, S. Africa, and Sydney; b. Sterkstroom, Cape, S. Africa, 18 Aug., 1895. Killed in action, 3 May, 1917.

<sup>95</sup> The first machine-gun to open in this sector fired from an old German battalion headquarters in a ruined house.

By 7 o'clock posts had been placed along the northern edge of Le Barque and Ligny, and touch was presently gained with a post of the neighbouring unit (5th Battalion, 2nd Brigade) at the eastern end of Ligny.<sup>96</sup>

On the western side of the village fighting was sharper. This side being thickly fringed with trees, Captain Newland advanced with his four platoons abreast but each threading its way through the undergrowth in single file. They were not seen by the enemy until one or two men ran into a wire which had been stretched through a stunted hedge. A flare was immediately fired from the bank of the Warlencourt road close ahead, and a machine-gun opened from the same position. The troops flung themselves on the ground and, upon the enemy starting to throw bombs, Captain Newland and Lieutenant Butler,<sup>97</sup> with the right platoon, threw a few bombs in return and then charged. Newland was wounded. Butler and Sergeant Whittle,<sup>98</sup> reaching the bank, bombed the Germans, who ran up a track (the "Misty Way") towards the Bapaume road; eight or ten were shot by a Lewis gun as they went, but they succeeded in saving their machine-gun from capture. Newland's company occupied the trench enclosing Le Barque on this side and joined the others at the northern exit of the village. The 11th Battalion at once continued the advance through Thilloy. A few small parties of the 5th Prussian Foot Guard were bombed back, and posts were put out in shell-holes beyond the villages. After digging themselves in, these were relieved on the night of February 27th by the 1st Brigade. That night the relieving battalions—3rd



<sup>96</sup> At the position known as "Buchanan's Cross," from which a road ("Black Street") ran northwards into Thilloy.

<sup>97</sup> Lieut. L. T. Butler, 12th Bn. University student; of Sandy Bay, Tas.; b. Hobart, 18 Jan., 1894.

<sup>98</sup> Sgt J. W. Whittle, V.C., D.C.M. (No. 2902, 12th Bn.). Member of Aust. Permanent Forces; of Launceston and Hobart, Tas.; b. Huon Island, Tas., 3 Aug., 1883.



and 4th—increased the number of forward posts, and the 2nd Brigade linked up with them by a chain of posts across the open from Barley Trench.

Thus by the morning of February 28th all three villages were within the 1st Division's line, which now lay in comparatively green country and, at a distance of from 500 to 800 yards, faced the enemy's main position in the R.I line (Till Trench). On its right the 15th Brigade (5th Division), by difficult patrol fighting, in which it was hampered by wire and machine-guns, at last cleared the posts of the 93rd R.I.R. from Barley Trench.<sup>99</sup> At his pivoting point on the right of the corps he still gave no ground.

On the German side it had been noted that, on February 26, with the return of bright weather and aeroplane activity, the British artillery, from which the Germans had for a short space ceased to suffer, shelled the R.I line. The attacks by the 3rd and 5th Brigades that afternoon and the following night are accurately described in the German records. On the 26th the 5th Guard Grenadier Regiment had relieved its rear-guard by fresh troops—seven sections with machine-guns under three officers—and it was one of these sections (under Lieutenant of Reserves Dierks) which faced Captain Newland's attack. According to the German account, Dierks eventually ordered his troops to withdraw, and during the retirement suffered loss. As Newland's position now threatened from the rear the post of the 5th Guard Grenadier at the crossing of Malt Trench and the Bapaume road, the rear-guard commander ordered this also to withdraw westwards through the territory of the neighbouring 1st Guard Reserve Division.

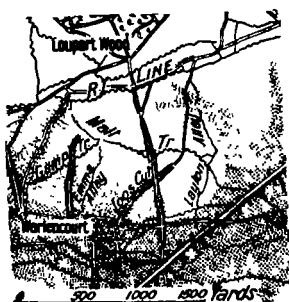
The Australians were now approaching the main front line, R.I, and the rear-guards of the 4th Guard Division were entirely withdrawn. The historian of the 5th Guard Grenadier therefore claims with fairness that it had held back its opponents longer than was expected; yet the casualties for the whole regiment from February 21 to 28 were only thirty.

It was thus the breaking of the dam in front of the 3rd Brigade that allowed the Australian advance to flow westward across the Bapaume road, up "Layton Alley,"<sup>100</sup> and around the eastern foot of the natural bastion protecting Loupart Wood. That bastion, on whose edge lay the higher part of Malt Trench, now became the centre of the struggle on the I Anzac front.

<sup>99</sup> A well-sited machine-gun post, first in "Bread Trench" (an advanced tributary of Barley Trench), and later at a road-cutting and in Barley Trench itself, was the main obstacle.

<sup>100</sup> Named after Lieut. L. Layton-Smith (of Sydney) of the 19th Bn.

It will be remembered that the 6th Brigade had unsuccessfully attacked that position on February 25th. The 24th Battalion, which had taken over the front after that attempt, had waited for the co-operation of the 5th Brigade before again attacking. At 9.30 p.m. on the 26th, however, the staff of the 2nd Division was electrified by a report, telephoned from the 24th Battalion to 6th Brigade Headquarters, that a scouting party,<sup>101</sup> finding the entanglement of Malt Trench, near its junction with Gamp Trench, smashed and passable, had entered the trench and moved eastward along it for two or three hundred yards without meeting Germans. The report might indicate that the further withdrawal, constantly expected, had occurred. In any case, seeing that possession of the bastion was a vital preliminary to Gough's intended major attack, strong action was taken by Gellibrand both to ascertain why the trench had not immediately been occupied and to ensure that this should now, if possible, be done. As the 6th Brigade was then in course of relief by the 7th, the commander of the 24th (then Lieutenant-Colonel Fitz-Gerald) handed over the task to the incoming battalions. A second patrol, however, had already found the Germans in strength at the junction of Gamp and Malt Trenches. Several strong parties of the 7th Brigade were now sent out. One, from the 28th Battalion, on the western half of the hill got within thirty yards of the trench, when it was fired on and a sergeant, Munro,<sup>102</sup> was killed. Another, from the 27th farther right, found German flares being thrown as usual, the trench well garrisoned, and the wire-entanglement, though not thick, a strong obstacle. Subsequent inquiry showed that the 24th Battalion's patrol had undoubtedly entered Malt Trench at a point between two German outposts.



<sup>101</sup> Under Sgt. H. W. Clough (of Eaglehawk, Vic.) of the 24th.

<sup>102</sup> Sgt. R. C. Munro (No. 1876; 28th Bn.), Draughtsman; of Claremont, W. Aust.; b. Canterbury, Vic., 8 Feb., 1895. Killed in action, 26 Feb., 1917.

Early reports of the incident caused General Smith of the neighbouring 5th Brigade to order his left battalion to push up from the lower part of Malt Trench towards the higher. Communication with his front line was, however, slow and difficult, and it was not until the afternoon that the 19th Battalion, which had just relieved the 20th, penetrated to Layton Alley, a communication trench on the eastern flank of the bastion. The insistence of the commanders was increased by an incorrect report from an airman that the lower part of Malt Trench was empty, and the higher part held by only a few men. But the progress of the 19th Battalion, already difficult in that boggy avenue, was held up by a strong enemy post which for two more days continued to resist its constant attacks.

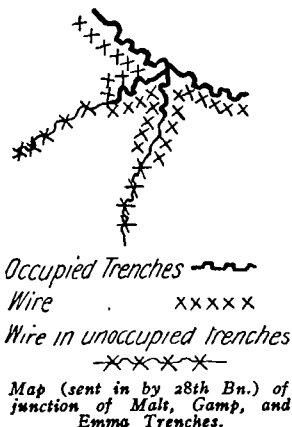
German records state that "strong attacks" accompanied by "heavy grenade fighting" were made by the Australians in this area at 4.30 and 5.30 p.m. on the 27th and again on the 28th. The German command recognised that, if the south-east corner of the Warlencourt "Bastion" was taken, the whole position on this promontory would be endangered.

Meanwhile, in response to the urgency of General Gellibrand, and assuming that it was possible to penetrate between the separate posts holding the high sector of Malt Trench, General Wisdom of the 7th Brigade endeavoured to effect this by sending strong bombing parties up Gamp Trench on the left and the sunken roads on the right. After many changes in orders, the attempt was made shortly before midnight of February 27th by five parties of the 28th organised by Captain A. Brown. But Gamp Trench, up which one party worked, was found to be blocked near the hilltop with impassable wire. Lieutenant Ahnall<sup>103</sup> therefore led this party over the open towards the supposed junction of Gamp and Malt, where the chief enemy strong-post lay. Here, faced by dense wire, he was mortally wounded by a machine-gun, and, after a bomb-fight, the attack was driven back. On the right, parties of the 27th<sup>104</sup> found the sunken roads blocked with wire, and held by parties with bombs and machine-guns, of which Captain Devonshire located six firing from the sector attacked by the brigade. Still under pressure

<sup>103</sup> Lieut. K. A. B. Ahnall, D.C.M.; 28th Bn. Pearler; of Broome, W. Aust.; b. Stockholm, Sweden, 1888. Died of wounds while prisoner of war, 2 March, 1917.

<sup>104</sup> Under Lieuts. D. W. Caldwell and W. L. Davies and Sergeant J. Lockwood. (Caldwell belonged to Semaphore, S. Aust.; Davies to Kent Town, S. Aust.; Lockwood to Norwood, S. Aust.)

from Gellibrand, Brigadier-General Wisdom brought up his 26th Battalion to attack before daylight. As it arrived late, and both the 27th and 28th reported the German wire impassable,<sup>105</sup> the order was cancelled. Nevertheless, at 2.30 on February 28th a party of the 27th<sup>106</sup> made still another attempt to work up one of the sunken roads, but after a sharp bomb-fight was driven back by machine-guns firing from both sides of it.<sup>107</sup> That night one of Captain Brown's officers,<sup>108</sup> who had all day lain out in a shell-hole close to the German strong-point, confirmed the opinion already sent to headquarters by Brown: "We shall not do any good till the wire is cut by artillery."



German records state that heavy fighting was necessary in order to stop the Australian thrust northwards. On February 28 no less than seven attacks were made on the Bastion—that is, up Layton Alley and on Malt Trench—but all were bombed back with heavy loss, not only to the Australians but to the parts of the 1st Guard Reserve Division engaged.<sup>109</sup> The division was given freedom to decide how long it should hold Malt Trench.

On the British side at midday on the 28th the commander of the Fifth Army, Sir Hubert Gough, visited the forward area of I Anzac and explained his plan of attacking Loupart Wood. The 2nd Australian Division must first swing almost at right angles to the front of the II Corps, so as to attack north-west, while the II Corps struck north-east. Nothing, however, could be done till Malt Trench was captured. Brigadier-General Wisdom at once undertook that the 7th Brigade would take that trench, but only if the wire was first cut by artillery bombardment, which would require two

<sup>105</sup> Lieut.-Col. R. J. A. Travers (of Bondi, N.S.W.) of the 26th represented that the attack without artillery preparation would be reckless.

<sup>106</sup> Sixty strong, under Lieut. L. V. Parkes (of Waikerie, S. Aust.).

<sup>107</sup> The crew of one was driven away with bombs, but, as the Australian bombers tired and the bomb supply ran short, the gun was remanned. The Australians lost 3 killed, 20 wounded.

<sup>108</sup> Lieut. C. H. Pugh (of Subiaco, W. Aust.).

<sup>109</sup> The 7th company of the 64th R.I.R., and the 5th and 7th companies of the 1st Gd. Res. Regt.

days. Gough agreed to this and the bombardment began at once. Through shortage both of time and of guns, it was decided merely to cut "lanes" through the wire. At the time of Pozzières this used to be done by field artillery battering down the entanglements with low-burst shrapnel, but high-explosive shells had recently been fitted with the new "106" percussion fuse, a device so sensitive that their burst occurred immediately on striking any surface and was not smothered by several feet of earth. Such shells made no crater, but their fragments scarred the ground for yards around the point of impact<sup>110</sup> and could kill a man 800 yards away. Heavy shells fitted with this fuse were now used against the Malt Trench entanglement, but its situation on a height rendered it difficult to see, and, although artillery observers stationed themselves in the sunken roads near by, as well as on the Butte, and high on the British side of the valley, the fire was inaccurate. If the wire was sufficiently cut, the place was to be attacked before daybreak on March 2nd, but at midday on the 1st the infantry reported that the entanglement was unbroken on the left. By 7 p.m., however, 4,000 shells had been fired by the field-guns and 40 "plum-pudding bombs" by two medium trench-mortars, taken up one of the sunken roads by Lieutenant Ralph,<sup>111</sup> and at midnight patrols, in spite of the thickness, were able to report that sufficient openings had been made.<sup>112</sup> Not without a lingering doubt, General Wisdom decided that the attack should go forward.

Portions of three infantry battalions—the 27th, 26th, and 28th—were to take part, assembling on the hill above Warlencourt. Assembly tapes were hurriedly laid out 250 yards from the trench to be attacked; the troops, as they climbed the slope, were covered by the bend of the hill and by the mist. A few minutes before 3 a.m. they were in position—three companies of the 26th between the sunken roads and "Emma Alley," a company and a "raiding party"<sup>113</sup> of the 28th west of Gamp Trench, and a company of the 27th in the sunken road ("Loos Cut")

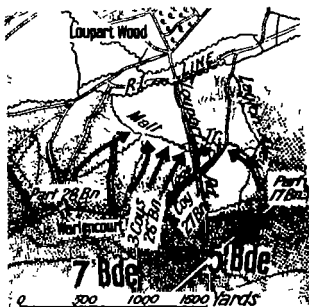
<sup>110</sup> See *Vol. XII*, plate 352. The infantry called them "daisy-cutters" or "ground shrapnel."

<sup>111</sup> Lieut. C. G. Ralph, 2nd Medium T.M. Bty. Clerk; of Adelaide; b. Hawthorne, S. Aust., 20 Oct., 1890.

<sup>112</sup> The patrols of the 27th gave the measurements of the "lanes." One man had paced the distance while another wrote down the notes.

<sup>113</sup> The party which had been practising for a raid on the Butte of Warlencourt, under Lieut. L. G. Allen.

behind the right flank of the 26th This company was to enter Malt Trench on the right of the road, and bomb down it towards the 17th Battalion (5th Brigade), which held the trench lower down as far as its junction with Layton Alley. At 3 a.m. the allotted field artillery—six batteries of eighteen-pounders and two of field-howitzers—laid down a barrage which for three minutes, while the infantry was moving forward from its tapes, fell fifty yards short of the German trench.<sup>114</sup> From 3.3 to 3.10 the barrage lay on Malt Trench, and was then thrown 300 yards farther back, and for ten more minutes continued gradually to advance, but with diminishing intensity. The Stokes mortars of the 7th Brigade<sup>115</sup> joined in from 3 to 3.10. At 3.10 the infantry, which had crept very close to the barrage, attacked.



On the left, the 28th, which had assembled on the western slope of the prominence and attacked the sector west of Gamp Trench, found itself faced by a completely unbroken entanglement,<sup>116</sup> down which were playing two machine-guns from right and left respectively, making a band of sparks along the wire. After six or seven men were killed and hung caught in the meshes, Lieutenant Allen<sup>117</sup> first ordered his troops to take cover in shell-holes, of which there were plenty, and subsequently, as the Germans were throwing flares and bombing them with a trench-mortar,<sup>118</sup> withdrew them down the hill to shelter. On the main front of attack, between Emma Alley and the Loupart road, the left company of the 26th found a gap and entered the trench. The centre company could find no break, and its commander, Captain

<sup>114</sup> The rate for each field-gun was three rounds per minute and for the howitzers two rounds.

<sup>115</sup> Two emplaced in Emma Alley and one in Loos Cut.

<sup>116</sup> Only one small passage was found, evidently left for the exit of patrols. The scouts who had reported the wire cut had probably by mistake examined the wire between the heads of Emma and Gamp Trenches, where a "lane" had been cut.

<sup>117</sup> Capt. L. G. Allen, M.C.; 28th Bn. Ironmonger; of Albany, W. Aust.; b Albury, N.S.W., 17 March, 1889

<sup>118</sup> This mortar was afterwards captured

Cherry, after having moved along the wire searching for one while the barrage was on the trench, led his men in single file through a gap in the right company's sector. He was here wounded, but continued to lead the fight for his company's objective. He personally captured one German machine-gun and his men captured another.<sup>119</sup> Finally, the opposing Germans, finding themselves pressed between his company and that on the left, broke from the trench and fled to their rear, and the two companies joined.<sup>120</sup> On the front of the right company the wire, being within easy range of the trench-mortars, had been well cut, and the company commander, Captain Woods,<sup>121</sup> led his men through it with the last shell—so impetuously, indeed, that he was hit in the thigh by a shell from the Australian guns. Lieutenant Ward,<sup>122</sup> on his heels, took his place. In spite of the speed of the attack the Germans stood their ground, but gave in after ten minutes of fierce bomb-fighting.<sup>123</sup> The trench from Loupart road to near the head of Emma Alley was thus captured.

Meanwhile the company of the 27th had forced its way into the sector of Malt Trench east of the Loupart road, Lieutenant Botten,<sup>124</sup> who led the bombers, being wounded but continuing to lead until he was killed. The company commander, Captain Julge, also was seriously hit, but Lieutenant Coombe,<sup>125</sup> on whom the command devolved, speedily worked with his bombers down 130 yards of trench. Here the 27th was to stop and look out for the 5th Brigade,

<sup>119</sup> Cherry turned these two guns on the enemy.

<sup>120</sup> The pass-word and countersign of the 5th and 7th Brigades this day were the names of the two brigadiers—"Smith" and "Wisdom." It was reported that, as Cherry's company and the left company bombed towards one another, the Germans between them were heard crying "Wisdom!" Any sceptically-minded outsider would naturally suspect that what the men of each company really heard was the men of the other shouting the pass-word as they approached. Some of those present, however, were definite in their report that the shouts were in a strong German accent—"Visden! Visden!" It is possible that the Germans heard the pass-word shouted, and repeated it in order to stop the Australian bombers. From that time forward the 7th Brigade, in choosing pass-words, exercised a preference for those which the average German could not pronounce, such as "Through" and "Thorough."

<sup>121</sup> Major A. O. Woods, M.C.; 26th Bn. Ironmonger; of Hobart, Tas.; b. Oatlands, Tas., 24 Sept., 1886. Killed in action, 2 Sept., 1918.

<sup>122</sup> Lieut. C. C. Ward, M.C.; 26th Bn. Sugar farmer; of Ipswich and Ayr, Q'land, b. Warwick, Q'land, 4 Dec., 1885. Died of wounds, 8 March, 1917.

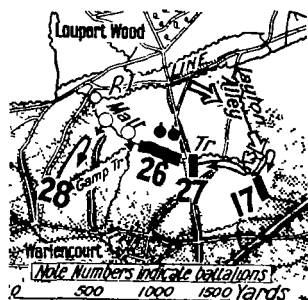
<sup>123</sup> In this, two other junior officers of the company, Lieuts. P. C. Hall and J. Glasgow (a brother of Major General Glasgow), were wounded. (Hall belonged to Enoggera, Q'land; Glasgow, who died on 4 April, 1925, to Gympie, Q'land.)

<sup>124</sup> Lieut. R. H. Botten, 27th Bn. Bank clerk; of Prospect, S. Aust., b. Prospect, 25 Sept., 1888. Killed in action, 2 March, 1917.

<sup>125</sup> Lieut. W. S. Coombe, 27th Bn. School teacher; of Eden Hills and Prospect, S. Aust.; b. Brompton, S. Aust., 12 Sept., 1888.

which would be bombing from the other direction. As, however, it did not appear, leave was obtained to send a bombing squad farther. This presently found itself faced by a barrier behind which were Germans who resisted stoutly. Meanwhile a party of reinforcing Germans had filed in behind the bombing squad, through a side alley which had been overlooked. The bombers were thus cut off, and it was with difficulty that two survivors, leaving the trench and creeping past the intruders, returned to their mates. These had been surprised by the appearance of the Germans, who counter-attacked and drove the 27th back to the Loupart road.

The reverse seriously threatened the right flank of the 26th, whose nearest company commander, Lieutenant Ward, was then placing his posts, as ordered, far in advance of Malt Trench in front of the Gréville line. He now sent back to say that he was meeting the danger by throwing back his right. At the



same time, at Captain Devonshire's headquarters down near Warlencourt, where the news had just arrived, there was heard "a hoarse cheer" which obviously came from no British throats. All men of the 27th in Warlencourt were at once sent forward under Lieutenant Davies,<sup>126</sup> loaded with bombs and boxes of ammunition, Lieutenant Caldwell<sup>127</sup> taking command of the fighting. The Germans were now shelling the Loupart road, and Caldwell, while restoring order among the scattered troops there and organising along the road-bank a defence by the 26th and 27th, was killed.<sup>128</sup> Lieutenant Lampard,<sup>129</sup> however, held the road-bank while Davies, with a couple of N.C.O.'s<sup>130</sup> and a "scratch" bombing party, seized 300 yards of the trench, including three German

<sup>126</sup> Lieut. W. L. Davies, M.C.; 27th Bn. School teacher; of Kent Town, S. Aust., b. St. Peters, S. Aust., 28 Sept., 1888.

<sup>127</sup> Lieut. D. W. Caldwell, 27th Bn. Carpenter; of Semaphore, S. Aust.; b. Exeter, S. Aust., 1893. Killed in action, 2 March, 1917.

<sup>128</sup> The same shell killed Lieutenant A. O. Lucas (of Malvern, S. Aust.).

<sup>129</sup> Lieut. V. W. Lampard, M.C.; 27th Bn. Grocer; of Thebarton, S. Aust.; b. Bowden, S. Aust., 14 Aug., 1896. Killed in action, 2 Sept., 1918.

<sup>130</sup> One was Sergeant J. Lockwood, the other "a fierce looking N.C.O." who, with a revolver in each hand, led the bombing party.



posts and, at the intersection of Loos Cut, waited for daylight to make plain the position of the 5th Brigade.

That brigade earlier in the night had, by a well-planned stroke, captured 500 yards of Layton Alley,<sup>131</sup> and dug its advanced posts in line with those of the 7th Brigade and with its own new barricade in Layton Alley. Thus before daylight the whole objective had been captured, except for a short section on each flank of the 7th Brigade. The fog lay thick, and a counter-attack was every moment expected. At 5.30, just before dawn, a remarkably heavy barrage fell on the extreme right and drove in two of the new posts of the 5th Brigade beside Layton Alley. Down the alley itself the shells burst in enfilade, and the whole area immediately behind the front was included in the bombardment. After the shells had been flying over for half-an-hour, the posts of the 7th Brigade on the summit of the prominence observed close in front a long file of Germans issuing from Grévillers Trench and descending into the valley in which Layton Alley lay. Believing that they were the defeated enemy coming back to surrender, the troops signalled to them and ceased fire, until the Germans began to advance in line with some extraordinary step.<sup>132</sup> Lewis gunners and riflemen at once opened fire, and the Germans vanished; the 26th believed they had been "wiped out." At 6.25, however, a body of the enemy appeared bombing down Layton Alley. S.O.S. rockets were sent up, and the Australian guns responded heavily,<sup>133</sup> but the alley was lost. Two hours later the 5th Brigade learned that the neighbouring posts of the 1st Division also had been attacked and driven in.

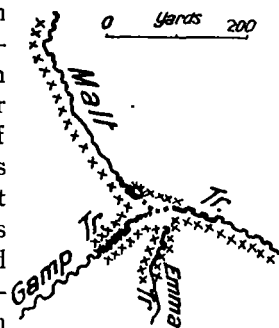
A double task therefore confronted the 2nd Division—to capture the left of the objective and to recapture Layton Alley. On the left the attacking force of the 28th was

<sup>131</sup> At 9.48 p.m. while the enemy's position in the alley was being bombarded by trench-mortars and frontally attacked by bombers of the 17th under Sergeant H. I. Pearson (of Coburg, Vic.), another party of that battalion was quietly led by Lieutenant Lyons across the open from the Bapaume road under cover of mist and entered the alley 150 yards farther north, in rear of its garrison. The Germans, who heard this party approaching, but imagined that it was their own relief, were quickly bombed into surrender. The enemy farther up Malt Trench made two attempts to regain the lost sector, but were driven off by Lewis gun fire and were presently suppressed by the 7th Brigade's attack.

<sup>132</sup> Probably the Prussian "parade stride" or "goose step." The Australians who had never seen it before were wonderstruck. Captain Cherry afterwards said that the enemy advanced "like a mob of blacks at a corroboree." Others described the drill as "a sort of haka dance."

<sup>133</sup> They also answered a call for a "light barrage" on the front of the 7th Brigade.

withdrawn and put in again through the sector captured by the 26th.<sup>134</sup> A number of bombers picked from the party by Lieutenant Leaver<sup>135</sup> were then led to the left flank of the 26th, held by Lieutenant Lloyd,<sup>136</sup> and began to bomb to the west. They had barely started when they found that a section of the trench ahead of them had not been completely dug; it dwindled into a channel less than two feet in depth. Along this Leaver and a famous bomber of the 26th, by name Forte,<sup>137</sup> attempted to thrust, but were met with bombs both from Gamp Trench and from the continuation of Malt, where a machine-gun post beside a low mound had for some days been a principal centre of German resistance. Leaver was wounded and Forte killed. About noon the remainder of the 28th's party, under Lieutenants King and Allen, arrived and rushed the redoubt, but found most of its garrison with their machine-gun in course of retirement to the west along Malt Trench.<sup>138</sup> Lieutenant Allen with a bombing party cleared the trench and blocked it at the limit of the objective. Another bombing party seized Gamp Trench, finding, under the dense wire<sup>139</sup> which blocked it, three dugouts, whose garrison surrendered. On the other flank the 27th presently joined up with the 17th after an



<sup>134</sup> Lieut. Allen had already been ordered by Lieut.-Colonel G. A. Read (of Fremantle, W. Aust.) to renew the attempt, and, after re-examining the entanglement and finding it intact, was about to attempt an entrance by Gamp Trench when he received the order to go through the 26th. This order was due to the discovery that the maps were wrong, the heads of Gamp Trench and Emma Alley being not, as depicted, contiguous, but thirty yards apart and connected only by half-dug trench.

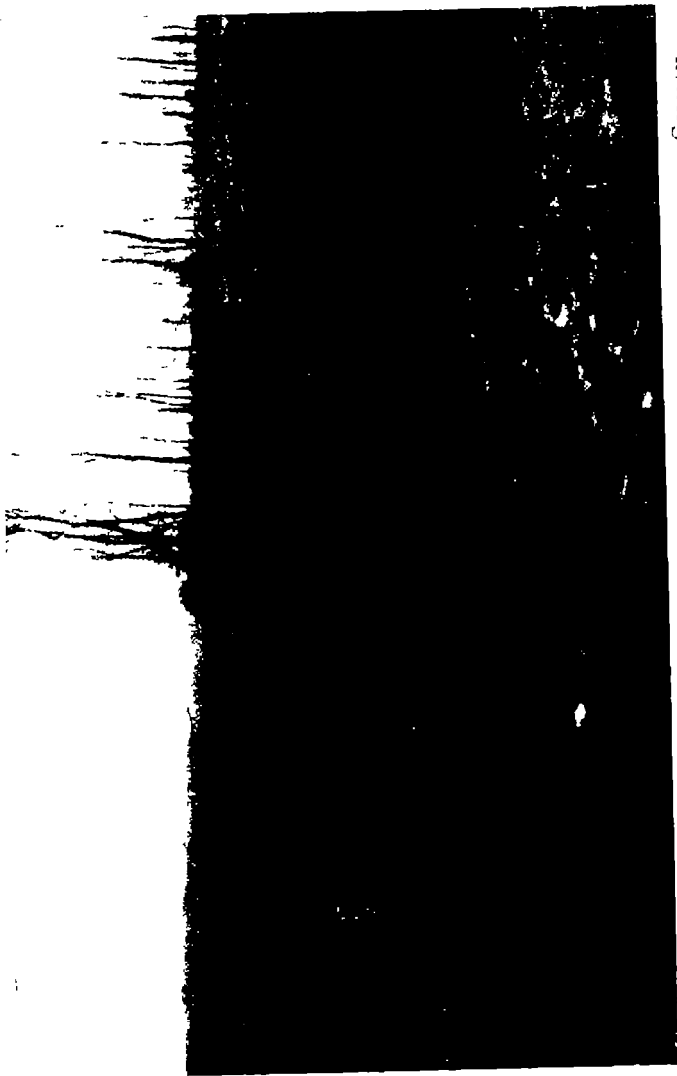
<sup>135</sup> Lieut. W. A. Leaver, M.C., M.M.; 28th Bn. School teacher; of Victoria Park, W. Aust.; b. Cobar, N.S.W., 10 Sept., 1897.

<sup>136</sup> Capt F. C. Lloyd, M.C., D.C.M.; 26th Bn. Bank clerk; of Brisbane; b. Roma, Q'land, 1892.

<sup>137</sup> Known as "Darkie Forte." On the Gallipoli Peninsula Forte had, by himself, raided in daylight a Turkish bombing position at The Nek. He was said to have walked over the parapet on a windy day at Armentières to recover his hat, which had blown into No-Man's Land. (610 Pte. E. Forte, M.M.; 26th Bn. Labourer; of Avoca, Vic.; b. Mount Lonarch, Vic., 1884. Killed in action, 2 March, 1917.)

<sup>138</sup> As the retiring Germans seemed to be hesitating whether to surrender or to shoot, King took the risk, often fatal, of walking forward to beckon them in. As they still hesitated, King sent Allen's party to seize the trench.

<sup>139</sup> This wire was on "knife rests" securely embedded in both walls of the trench, and extended for sixty yards down its course.



9. "KNOTTY POINT," NORTH-WEST OF THILLOV, SCENE OF FIGHTING DURING THE GERMAN  
RAIDS OF 2ND MARCH, 1917

*Aust War Memorial Official Photo No E496  
Taken in May 1917*

*To face p 104.*



10. "TILL TRENCH," THE GERMAN FRONT LINE (R I) AFTER THE CAPTURE OF THILLOV

*Aust War Memorial Official Photo No E495  
Taken in May 1917*

*To face p 105.*

unfortunate exchange of bombs before the mutually approaching parties had recognised each other. At 1 p.m. the 17th Battalion, under cover of a barrage, bombed up Layton Alley and retook it.

The available German records have little to say concerning the capture of Malt Trench.<sup>140</sup> As the "Bastion" was important, the garrison had been strengthened and was said by prisoners to consist of two companies of the 64th R.I.R. (on the left and centre of the Australian attack), one and a half companies of the 1st Guard Reserve Regiment (on the Australian right), and seven machine-guns.<sup>141</sup> It seems probable that, after most of the trench had been lost and the counter-attacks of the "storm companies" (which, according to the *History of the 64th R.I.R.*, were thrown in) and of the 1st Guard Reserve Regiment on the eastern flank had been beaten, either the divisional or the local commander exercised his option and withdrew the last troops from the strong-point at the mound.

The 2nd Division had thus established itself on the Loupart bastion close in front of the main German position in the R.I. line. To obtain a "jumping-off" position for Gough's intended assault on that line, the posts were advanced on subsequent nights. Many posts of the 1st Division also had been similarly advanced on the night of the Malt Trench attack. Their garrisons had barely dug themselves in when the whole front of that division and the inner flanks of its neighbours were subjected to a sharp elaborately planned counter-stroke, which was obviously unconnected with the attack at Malt Trench but was the reason for the German bombardment laid on the forward area at 5.30 a.m.

Late in the previous evening information had been obtained from a German prisoner that an attempt was to be made by three or four patrols, each of 30-40 men, to obtain information of the British dispositions on that part of the front. The intelligence staff succeeded in getting this warning through before midnight to a few of the nearer Australian outposts on the right of Le Barque, but the remainder

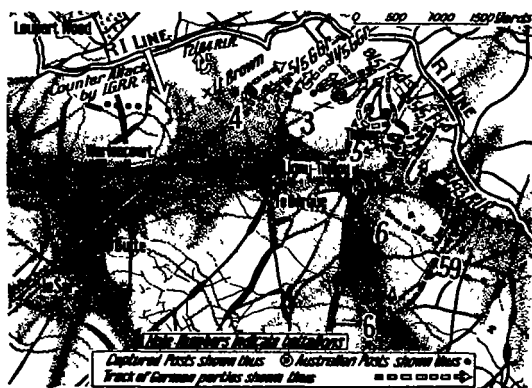
**Enemy raid  
on Le Barque**

<sup>140</sup> The chief reference occurs in the history of the 1st Guard Res. F.A. Regiment, which was covering the sector, "there followed stubborn fighting around the bastion, like slope lying south of Loupart Wood, shut in between the 'Warlencourt Switch' (Malt Trench) and Leipzig Way (Layton Alley), and it was only on March 3, after nine days' resistance, that it was abandoned in accordance with orders." By "abandonment" must be meant either the withdrawal of the last remnant of troops after the rest had been driven out, or the decision not to counter-attack when once the trench had been lost.

<sup>141</sup> The prisoners included 57 of the 64th R.I.R., 8 of the 1st Gd. R.R., and 6 machine-gunners and pioneers.

appear to have been unwarned when the bombardment began. At 6 o'clock it eased. The fog was much too thick to allow the detection of any general movement by the enemy, but, several hours later, reports of isolated attacks by strong parties began to arrive at corps headquarters from nearly all parts of the I Anzac front.

From these it was evident that the operation had been more important than was at first supposed. To the right of the



three villages two parties of the 93rd R.I.R., advancing in the morning mist, had each unknowingly penetrated between the advanced Australian posts, had captured a few men who happened to be moving across country on some duty, and then, with their prisoners, had stumbled on some Australian post. The easternmost party ran into the support line of the 6th Battalion in Pork Trench 600 yards behind the front line, and, being fired on, vanished into the fog, the captured Australians escaping. Captain Taylor and Lieutenant Forbes<sup>142</sup> of the 6th, with only 14 men, at once followed, found the Germans, and, working round them, captured the whole party.<sup>143</sup> The second German party came from the rear upon one of the 6th Battalion's forward posts, which, in consequence of the warning from corps headquarters, had been increased to a strength of ten men with a Lewis gun.<sup>144</sup> To a summons to surrender, Lance-Corporal Lindhe<sup>145</sup> replied with a bomb whose explosion gave Private

<sup>142</sup> Lieut. J. W. Forbes, 6th Bn. Bank accountant; of Melbourne and North Sydney; b. Cairns, Q'land, 20 Dec., 1890. Killed in action, 20 Sept., 1917.

<sup>143</sup> It then numbered twenty of the 93rd R.I.R., including its leader, the commander of the 11th Company, wounded, and an under-officer.

<sup>144</sup> This had been done at the request of Lieut. R. A. Hall, the officer-in-charge of three advanced posts connecting Barley Trench with Thilloy.

<sup>145</sup> Cpl. N. F. Lindhe, D.C.M. (No 2199; 6th Bn.). Labourer; of Swan Hill, Vic.; b. Hay, N.S.W., 1896. Killed in action, 30 Oct., 1917.

Tweedie<sup>146</sup> time to switch round the Lewis gun. There followed a bomb-fight in which the commander of the post, Lance-Corporal Pattinson,<sup>147</sup> and more than half the men, including Tweedie, were wounded, but the Germans were driven off. Feeling their way through the fog towards the east of the three villages they soon afterwards ran into the rear of a 5th Battalion post, which shot some of them down. Here their Australian prisoners escaped.<sup>148</sup> The surviving Germans were followed by patrols,<sup>149</sup> which shot 5 and captured 11.

North and north-west of Thilloy other German parties had attacked. Some had been driven off, but several Australian posts were surprised and captured. These particular positions could not be visited by day, but at dusk patrols found two small garrisons of the 5th Battalion missing, and also two of the 3rd, and the positions empty except for two or three Germans who surrendered at sight.<sup>150</sup>

Another German party, advancing beside the Bapaume road, had slipped past the posts there, after a brush with one of them, and suddenly appeared at a company headquarters of the 4th Battalion, 200 yards in rear. The sentry at the dugout entrance at once gave the alarm, and was shot; the Lewis gun was bombed, and other bombs were rolled down the stairs. After inflicting a number of casualties,<sup>151</sup> the Germans captured a dozen Australians and the Lewis gun, but did not seize the dugout. They were making off with their prisoners when they were intercepted by a neighbouring post of the 3rd Battalion. Supports of the 4th and survivors from the dugout also attacked them, and in the mêlée most of the prisoners escaped, although unfortunately four were killed.<sup>152</sup> The Lewis gun was recaptured. On the other side

<sup>146</sup> Pte F. A. Tweedie, M.M. (No. 3966; 6th Bn.). Softgoodsman; of Ballarat, Vic.; b. Ballarat, 13 June, 1897.

<sup>147</sup> Sgt. A. Pattinson, M.M. (No. 3898; 6th Bn.). Farmer; of Lancefield, Vic.; b. Mount Blackwood, Vic., 22 Oct., 1895.

<sup>148</sup> The officer leading the German party, who was wounded at this juncture, had kept them close by him and had treated them to hot coffee carried by his stretcher-bearers. On approaching the Australian post, the prisoners had managed to get somewhat ahead of their guard.

<sup>149</sup> Under Lieuts. E. A. Hay (of Bendigo, Vic.) and R. G. Samson (of Footscray, Vic.).

<sup>150</sup> In a post of the 5th Battalion the Victorian soldier in charge, Lance-Corporal E. McK. Farrell (of Colac, Vic.) lay dead. This post was sited between several sunken roads into which it could not fire. In these the Germans obtained a lodgment and bombed the post.

<sup>151</sup> Lieutenant L. M. Lane was killed, and two other officers and five men were wounded.

<sup>152</sup> A German medical officer and five other ranks were captured.

of the Bapaume road two posts of the 4th Battalion,<sup>153</sup> after half their members had been killed or wounded, were captured by part of the same German company. But the left-flank post of the 4th Battalion held on. Its commander, Lieutenant Brown,<sup>154</sup> had been rendered anxious by the fog, and had retained the old garrison as well as the relief. With his 18 men, although the posts on either flank had been driven in or captured, he beat off an attack, the enemy leaving 8 killed.

German accounts of these raids show that they were suggested by the staff of the 4th Guard Division<sup>155</sup> on February 27, when the Australians, by flowing through the three villages, formed an almost egg-shaped salient. The division proposed that four companies—one from the neighbouring 64th R.I.R. (1st Guard Reserve Division) and one from each of its own regiments—should raid this salient simultaneously from west, north-west, north, and east. Employing methods of surprise, they were to capture the Australian posts, which would meanwhile have been engaged from the front by other supporting companies, and to return with the prisoners. The bombardment was to be heavy but short, since ammunition was limited. An object of the stroke was to make the other side more cautious, and delay its advance to the R.I. line.

The thrust of the Australians to Layton Alley caused a modification of the plan—the 1st Guard Reserve Division could now merely support the flank of the attack; and, at the last moment, even this was rendered impossible by the progress of the 5th Australian Brigade up Layton Alley early in the night. This drove back the company of the 64th R.I.R. responsible for supporting the flank, and endangered the whole operation. Part of the 1st Guard Reserve Regiment was immediately ordered to retake the lost ground. This counter-attacking force ran into the Australian attack upon Malt Trench, but nevertheless carried out its duty, and Layton Alley throughout the time of the raid was in German possession. The 64th R.I.R. was, however, unable to perform its part by seizing Lower Malt Trench near the Bapaume road, and so safeguarding the flank.

The artillery of the 4th Guard and neighbouring divisions opened on the villages at 5.30. The two central regiments (5th Guard Grenadier and 5th Foot Guard) each attacked with strong detachments from two companies, having apparently been permitted to throw in their supporting companies. The leading waves went forward at 5.45. It was the 5th company of the 5th Guard Grenadier, under Lieutenant Preuss, previously one of the commanders of the rear-guard, that slipped through the Australian line at the Bapaume road and stumbled on a company headquarters of the 4th Battalion. Preuss succeeded in returning to the German lines about 9 a.m., bringing a Lewis gun and a number of prisoners of the 1st Australian Division.

The 11th company after engaging by rifle-fire the attention of the Australian posts, itself advanced, but, after passing on its left one

<sup>153</sup> The 4th Battalion had just relieved the 17th.

<sup>154</sup> Lieut. V. V. Brown, M.C.; Australian Flying Corps. Salesman; b. Petersham, N.S.W., 1892.

<sup>155</sup> The general staff officer of the division was Captain Franz von Papen, afterwards Chancellor of Germany. He was with the division in 1916 at Mouquet Farm, and served later in Palestine (*see Vol. VII, pp. 495-6, 636-7*). At Nazareth he was nearly captured.



of the Australian posts, it found itself enfiladed from both flanks. Discovering no sign of the 5th company, it withdrew.

Of the 5th Foot Guard, strong detachments from two companies, brought up from rest, were to attack Thillooy and Ligny-Thillooy, the 8th from the north and the 5th from the north-east. Each advanced in three parties. The right party of the 8th was fired on by a Lewis gun and failed. The centre and left parties, helped by the mist, passed between the outposts. The centre party completely surprised the 3rd Battalion's post in "Trip Trench"—the New South Welshmen were cutting up their rations when bombs fell among them.<sup>156</sup> The left patrol captured the post of the 5th Battalion at the forked road north of Thillooy. Of the 5th company, the right patrol slipped into Thillooy, but the other two failed, the left patrol becoming involved with posts of the 5th Battalion in a mêlée from which only one wounded German escaped.

The fate of the company of the 93rd R.I.R., which was allotted to protect the left flank, but which wandered far behind the line of the 2nd Australian Brigade, has already been described.

The German corps and divisional staffs, though disappointed with these results, considered that the western half of the operation had been successful. "About 50" prisoners were reported to have been taken. Australian records show only 30 men captured out of a total loss of about 90. The Germans lost some 110 killed, wounded, and captured, of whom 45 became prisoners. The advantage was therefore well on the Australian side, although not to such a degree as the Anzac leaders at the time believed. These recognised that the loss of several outposts was due to the omission to put out wire entanglements, a precaution unpopular, apparently, with most British troops, and certainly so with the Australians.<sup>157</sup> Orders were now given to wire them at once; the empty positions, as soon as they could be reached, were reoccupied, additional posts stationed, and their connection into a trench line hastened.

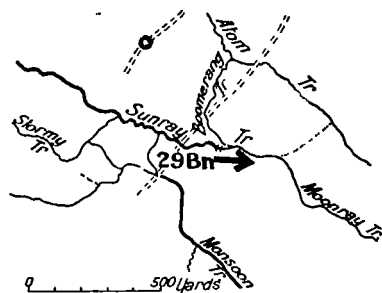
The same night which saw the capture of Malt Trench and the confused affair of the German raids saw also a sharp minor action north-east of Le Transloy at the extreme right of the I Anzac Corps, where the Germans still had a strong outpost in Sunray Trench and the newly-dug Boomerang Trench<sup>158</sup> 500 yards

<sup>156</sup> According to a statement of one of them after the war.

<sup>157</sup> The reason was not merely the danger to the party erecting the entanglement, but the fact that the wire, when erected, afforded a sign to the enemy of the positions occupied by the posts, and an excellent mark for shooting on them.

<sup>158</sup> See p. 91.

in front of the R.I. line.<sup>159</sup> Farther south, near Saily-Saillisel, on the morning of February 28th the British 29th Division had thrown two battalions against the German line south of the pivot and had captured part of the front line and more than 70 prisoners.<sup>160</sup> The 5th Australian Division now launched a bombing attack along Sunray Trench, north of the pivot. That trench was first slowly bombarded during the night of March 1st by two medium trench-mortars.<sup>161</sup> At 4 a.m. four Stokes mortars opened for two minutes at their fastest rate on different sectors of the objective, while the covering artillery and 8th Machine Gun Company threw a "box barrage" on the trenches surrounding it. At 4.2 the mortars ceased fire, and thirty men of the 29th Battalion, under Lieutenants Lacey<sup>162</sup> and Whitelaw,<sup>163</sup> attacked, still covered by the barrage, which continued for twenty minutes. Trusting to the mist to screen them, on reaching the German barricade they seized it, clambering out of the trench in order the better to throw their bombs. But they were at once seen by the Germans in Boomerang Trench, who, with bombs, forced them back into Sunray. The squad which was to block Boomerang Trench now discovered that the end of it which had been believed to afford access to Sunray had been dug only a foot deep. As the Germans in Boomerang would therefore be unable to bomb up it, there was little risk in ignoring them, and the order was given to press on up Sunray. The German garrison resisted stoutly, and the leading Victorians were wounded, but, with a sergeant<sup>164</sup> at



<sup>159</sup> In this neighbourhood the R.I. line was known as "Atom" and "Meteor" Trenches.

<sup>160</sup> An attempt by the 20th British Division of the same corps (XIV) to assist by the capture of a sunken road at Le Transloy failed.

<sup>161</sup> Their rate of fire was too slow for the bombardment preceding an attack. It was therefore arranged that they should throw, during the night, forty bombs. In order that the trench might not be destroyed by the creation of large craters, the bombs were fitted with "instantaneous" fuses.

<sup>162</sup> Lieut. C. L. Lacey, M.C.; 29th Bn. Clerk; of North Fitzroy, Vic.; b. Northcote, Vic., 28 Feb., 1895.

<sup>163</sup> Lieut. F. F. Whitelaw, M.C.; 29th Bn. Accountant; of Kerang, Vic.; b. Murtoa, Vic., 25 Aug., 1888. Died of wounds, 10 Aug., 1918.

<sup>164</sup> Sgt. C. A. Taylor (No. 638; 29th Bn.). Motor driver; of Warracknabeal, Vic.; b. Warracknabeal, 31 July, 1894.

its head, the party bombed and captured a machine-gun, rolled grenades into the shelters, and erected a barricade 250 yards down the captured trench. To safeguard this work, a party advanced another eighty yards down the trench, of which the garrison was chased back across the open by the fire of rifles and a Lewis gun.

It was then 5 a.m. As day whitened the mist, the troops, peering through it in constant expectation of counter-attack, at 6 o'clock caught sight of an approaching line of dim figures, about 100 yards to the north of Sunray Trench. This movement had not been prefaced by bombardment, and for a few seconds the Germans advanced with impunity. Then six Lewis guns and every rifle in the sector opened, and no part of the line came within fifty yards of the Australian trench. Another party, however, appeared south of it, but seemed bewildered, some of the men holding up their hands in token of surrender. Others, however, fired on Lieutenant Whitelaw, who went forward to call them in, and the indignant Victorians shot down the party. After the failure of this attempt, the German artillery turned its fire upon the area. It was quickly silenced by the British counter-batteries, but the enemy's trench-mortars continued to shoot all day, and about 7.45 p.m. greatly intensified their bombardment, the German artillery again joining in. This night was clear, and at 8.10 a single wave of men was seen to leave the R.I line ("Atom Trench") and advance from the north towards the newly-won position. Its garrison, however, had been strengthened with some Lewis guns of the 32nd Battalion; nine of these weapons were now in readiness. But almost before they opened, the artillery of the 5th Division responded to an S.O.S. signal with a barrage so prompt and accurate that the advancing line stopped and no other appeared.<sup>165</sup> The 29th Battalion seized the opportunity to capture another thirty yards of trench. The Germans shelled the position all next day, but the total loss of the 29th Battalion was only sixty.

The captured Germans were of the 8th Bavarian Regiment, part of the 14th Bavarian Division, which was then discovered to have replaced on February 28 the much over-strained 4th Ersatz Division. The available German records do not mention the fighting at Sunray Trench.

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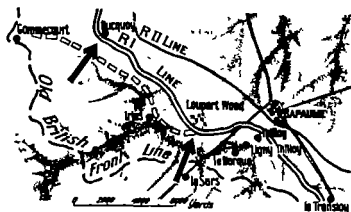
<sup>165</sup> According to one officer of the 29th, the artillery "cannot have taken more than twenty seconds" in answering the signal.

## CHAPTER V

### THE OCCUPATION OF BAPAUME. DISCORD IN THE HIGH COMMAND

THE fighting of March 2nd brought the 2nd Australian Division close enough to the R.I. line to have enabled I Anzac to attack that line and Loupart Wood from the south-east. But the II Corps, which was to attack them from the south-west, must still, before approaching R.I., drive the German outposts from Irles and from Gréville's Trench. At a conference at G.H.Q. on March 2nd Gough stated that he would deliver the main assault "about March 13th" and would attack Bucquoy, the northern pivot of the withdrawal, about the same date. It was notified that the aim of both operations was to gain observation over the gradual down-slope towards Arras, so as to co-operate later with the Third Army's offensive. Haig, being apprehensive that the Germans were withdrawing in order to save enough divisions to deliver a smashing counter-stroke in Flanders, insisted that the British also must withdraw every division that could be spared through the slackening of strain during the enemy's retreat. Gough decided to bring out the 1st Australian forthwith; he would then have seven divisions—two of them Australian—out of the line. The greater part of his heavy artillery was shortly to be sent north for the Arras offensive, and he was now informed that, if the Second Army was attacked, he must furnish still more.

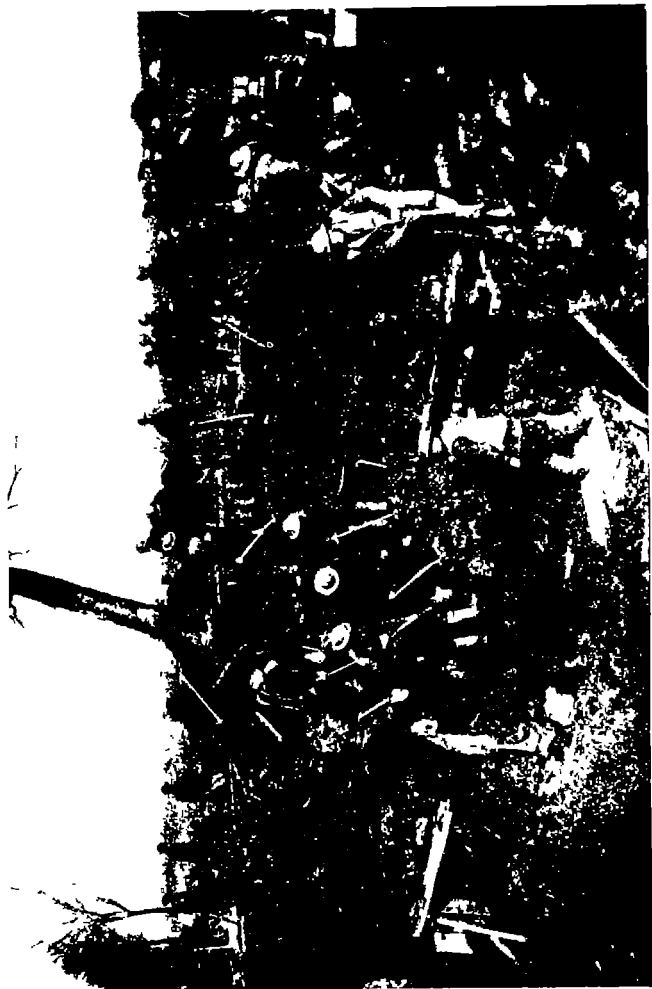
Accordingly, after thanking the Australian divisions "for the excellent work they have accomplished during the last four days," Gough withdrew the 1st—with the exception of its artillery—for greatly needed training.<sup>1</sup> Its front was taken over by its neighbours, the 5th extending westward and the 2nd eastward.<sup>2</sup> The I Anzac front was therefore now held



*The German outpost-line is shown by a broken white line.*

<sup>1</sup> The Australian divisions had all been in the line, whereas a proportion of others had been training.

<sup>2</sup> To effect this, the 2nd Division put its three brigades into the line, each with only one battalion in the front line, while the 5th held with two brigades, each with two battalions in the line.



II. 2ND PIONEER BATTALION FILLING IN A MINF-CRYTER ON THE MAIN ROAD NFAR BAPAUME,  
AND MPANWHILE LAYING A IFMPORARY TRACK ROUND BOTH ITS FDGLS

*To face p 112*

*Aust War Memorial Official Photo No E343*



12. GERMAN INFANTRY WITHDRAWING PAST A CRATER, BLOWN TO DESTROY A ROAD, MARCH, 1917

*By courtesy of the Reichsarchiv  
Aust. War Memorial Collection No. H13130*

by these two divisions, their point of junction lying beyond Thillooy, opposite the south-western corner of Bapaume, whose ramparts were less than a mile distant. The Germans had withdrawn to their R.I line along the whole of the Fifth Army's front, their right having fallen back from Gonnemecourt on the night of February 27th. Whether they would remain in the R.I line long enough for Gough to attack them on March 13th was recognised as doubtful. Almost every day prisoners taken by the Fifth Army confirmed the expectation of a further withdrawal by stages,<sup>3</sup> and, as the British air-patrols observed that the successive defence-lines as far as Cambrai were being hurriedly completed, it was assumed that these marked the projected stages. Yet, except for reported removals of dépôts in the back areas, there was so far no actually visible evidence of withdrawal from any part south of Le Transloy—that is, from the front of the Fourth Army and of the French. A few prisoners, largely officers, stoutly affirmed that the manœuvre was only local, and it is noteworthy that by this staunch affirmation they succeeded for at least a week in keeping alive lingering doubts whether the Germans would withdraw beyond Bapaume.

A further withdrawal at least to the R.II line, close in front of Bapaume, was however, hourly expected. By orders from Gough, all the Fifth Army's front-line divisions were enjoined to consider themselves advanced guards of their several corps, stationary for the moment, but ready to follow the enemy with due precaution as soon as he moved back. The brigades in the line now held their front lightly, with outpost companies in mutually supporting posts, patrols working in advance, strong supports stationed in rear, and the remaining force disposed in depth back on the old Somme battlefield.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile on March 3rd the bombardment of the R.I line<sup>5</sup> in front of Loupart Wood began, and the Australian posts were pushed to within 300 yards of it with orders to dig a trench from which to attack. But on the night

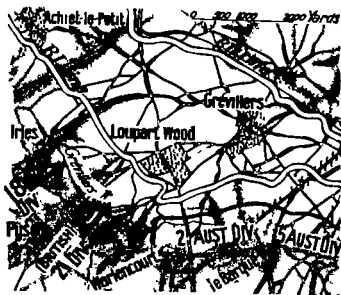
<sup>3</sup> A letter, written by a man of the 5th Guard Grenadier captured on March 3, said: "It is now our aim to bluff 'Tommy' as much as possible and to get gradually to the position where we intend to stay." The date of the letter was Feb. 25.

<sup>4</sup> They were accommodated largely in the old dugouts.

<sup>5</sup> Its front trench was in that sector known to the British as "Warlencourt Trench," and the support trench known as the "Gréville Line."

of the 4th snow fell heavily. The roads behind the II Corps threatened to break down under the traffic of lorries carrying heavy shells, and, although on the following night the II Corps cleared the Germans from west of Irles,<sup>6</sup> the main attack appeared likely to be further postponed.

On March 5th, however, there were observed along the front clear signs that the Germans would at an early date withdraw far beyond Bapaume. Heavy plumes of smoke rose from that town and the villages beyond it. Near Vélú, five miles back, a dump on the light railway was burning. In front of the Fourth Army and of the right of the Third smoke clouds rose from the villages.<sup>7</sup> The next day was fine with a keen gale, and British airmen observed a greatly abnormal number of railway trains moving eastwards and southwards in the German back area. Smoke now rose in columns daily from almost every village. Yet the patrols of the 6th and 7th Brigades (2nd Australian Division), who moved nightly along the wire of the R.I line, could only report that flares, machine-gun fire, and sniping shots came from it precisely as usual. Such was the position when, early on March 10th, the II Corps attacked with four battalions<sup>8</sup> the German out-post in Grévillers Trench.



The garrison of the 17th German Division, though a strong one, was cowed by the bombardment, and offered practically no resistance, 370 prisoners being taken.<sup>9</sup> These and others previously taken were positive that the R.I line was to be held

\* At "Resurrection Trench," taken by two companies of the 8th Suffolk Regiment, 18th Division.

<sup>7</sup> The Fifth Army intelligence staff, however, next day noted that these fires had not completely destroyed any village, and inferred that they meant the burning of dumps in the villages.

<sup>8</sup> Of the 2nd and 18th British Divisions.

<sup>9</sup> The 25th Battalion (2nd Australian Division) was to have assisted the right flank of the 2nd British Division in this attack by seizing Grévillers Trench at its junction with Malt. Patrols found, however, that the German wire had not been cut, and at the last moment this subsidiary assault was countermanded. The position was instead bombarded with trench-mortars, and an attempt was made to bomb up to the end of Malt Trench. This effort being checked by a machine-gun, a party of the 28th was sent round into the British trenches to reinforce the British right. It had started bombarding the enemy with one of their own mortars, and the Germans were waving a handkerchief in token of surrender, when the party, much to its disappointment, was recalled.



for some time. Preparations for the main attack upon it were accordingly hurried on. The task of seizing Loupart Wood itself was allotted to the II Corps, I Anzac being ordered to assist by seizing 1,500 yards of R.I and the south-eastern face of the wood. As the 2nd Australian Division had been nearly six weeks in the line, it had been intended that the 4th should be brought back and put in on a narrow front to carry out this attack. But it was now thought that the enemy would not seriously resist a powerful attack upon R.I, and, as the leaders of the 2nd Australian Division were deeply disappointed when the change was suggested,<sup>10</sup> and their troops were said to be keen, it was decided that this division should stay in the line and, with the 2nd British Division on its left, carry out the attack. General Smyth decided to employ his 7th Brigade.<sup>11</sup> To give it a short rest, it was to be relieved on the night of March 12th by the 5th, the latter's sector, immediately south of the Bapaume road, being "temporarily" taken over by the 8th Brigade of the 5th Australian Division.

Although the trenches confronting the infantry appeared to be strongly held, Gough's intelligence staff received continuous evidence that withdrawal was imminent. Only single guns were firing from certain German battery positions; a group of field-batteries at Grévillers, after unusual activity on March 6th, was practically silent on the 7th; next day the guns which fired on the British farther north were long-range pieces shooting from a distance. The Fifth Army's intelligence staff warned all its corps that these and other signs probably meant a withdrawal to the R.II line within the next few weeks, and that there were indications that the Germans were working to a time-table.

In spite of this warning, it was hoped that the Germans would be caught in R.I by Gough's attack, which was now imminent. The entanglement opposite the Anzac front had been bombarded for a week, but had not yet been cut when, on March 11th—which, one diary notes, was the first beautiful

<sup>10</sup> "We don't want anybody else to do our job," said Gellibrand. Colonel Bridges, according to one account, "got quite stuffy." Smyth, who on March 4 had resumed command of the division, wrote that it would be "well able to undertake the operation—in fact, the officers and men are most anxious to carry it out." Birdwood had on March 3 decided that, if the attack did not take place by the 13th, the 4th Division should deliver it.

<sup>11</sup> The reserve battalion (23rd) of the 6th would also take part.

spring day<sup>12</sup>—the II Corps began its preparatory bombardment. The tearing up of the wire continued all that day. At noon a fire began to burn in Grévillers village. The day was bright, and British aeroplanes took the opportunity to patrol, but the enemy machines resisted with unwonted stubbornness, four British aeroplanes being brought down. That night the infantry patrols going out after dark were fired on from R.I. as usual.<sup>13</sup> At 2.15 there occurred in the direction of Loupart Wood a series of loud explosions lasting for half-a-minute, and later another near Grévillers.

During next day, March 12th, no change was observed. The bombardment of R.I. continued, and additional orders for the action were issued. But, as soon as dusk fell, an alteration in the conditions became obvious to the sentries of the 6th Australian Brigade (south of Grévillers) and of the 7th (south of Loupart Wood). The German lines were abnormally silent, although flares were being thrown in great numbers. As constantly happened throughout this period, the first Australian leader to adopt vigorous action was Gellibrand. His suspicions had been aroused by the unusual activity of an enemy battery during the day,<sup>14</sup> and he had ordered the 21st Battalion to discover at dusk whether the Germans had retired. The first patrol was fired on from R.I. and, hearing voices there, reported that line still held; but, as the German artillery was presently observed to be shelling it, Gellibrand directed that it must be entered. A patrol under Lieutenant Hardwick<sup>15</sup> at 11.50 made its way through the entanglement south of Grévillers and found the enemy gone. At the same time a patrol of the 28th Battalion (7th Brigade), which was being relieved that night by the 17th (5th Brigade), reported that it had entered R.I. south of Loupart Wood and found it empty

<sup>12</sup> It was followed, of course, by many wintry and even snowy ones within the next month.

<sup>13</sup> Those of the 6th Brigade reported that the voices of the enemy in the Grévillers Line could be heard, that the Germans were at work behind their wire-entanglement, and that at one point they were, for some reason which was not evident, throwing bombs from their trench.

<sup>14</sup> The persistent shelling, during the morning, of his headquarters in a road-cutting at Le Sars gave him the impression that an enemy battery was firing off its stock of ammunition prior to withdrawing. During the midday meal, which he and his staff always took in an exposed chamber at the top of the dugout, this shell-fire was extremely noticeable. After visiting the head-quarters of the 5th Brigade, and learning that 250 "pineapple" bombs had been fired into its front line, he ordered the 21st Battalion to ascertain after dark whether his suspicions were justified.

<sup>15</sup> Lieut. W. E. Hardwick. M.C.; 21st Bn. Builder, of Leongatha, Vic; b. Brecon, Wales, 12 March, 1885. Killed in action, 5 Oct., 1918.

Conjecturing that he was on the heels of the retiring Germans, Gellibrand had besought the headquarters of the 2nd Division for leave to advance to R.I. in force; the suggestion had been rejected, and it was thus after midnight before the advance was ordered. The outpost companies at once moved up to the abandoned German line, and pushed patrols ahead, the reserve companies at the same time coming up to occupy the old outpost positions. By similar stages, caterpillar fashion, the 21st continued to advance over the open plateau beyond R.I., the patrols about day-break entering the half-ruined Grévillers<sup>16</sup> and the large quarry-hole, Fonds Bertin, west of it. By 11 o'clock the line of outposts had enclosed the village and lay within 500 yards of the outworks of the next German line—the formidable R.II Stellung, whose double trench crowned the Bapaume heights incorporating the old ramparts of the town.



Dark arrows show the points where R.I. line was first entered.

No enemy had thus far been met, except one man left behind with trench-feet; but parties of Germans were still withdrawing across the open north of Grévillers. The 17th Battalion (5th Brigade), after its relief of the 28th (7th Brigade), moved straight forward, and during the morning came up on the left of the 21st. The II Corps, receiving from the Australians news of the withdrawal, also pushed forward.<sup>17</sup> The Germans had not, however, abandoned their R.I line from Achiet-le-Petit, north-westwards, or from the

<sup>16</sup> The greater part of the church was then standing. It was finally destroyed by the Germans, who heavily shelled Grévillers all that day.

<sup>17</sup> The troops on the flank of the 2nd Australian Division were, by an interesting coincidence, the 6th Brigade of the 2nd British Division. In this sudden advance the Australians covered the ground beyond the boundary now allotted to their division. This was adjusted later (see note 20, on p. 119).

Bapaume road, south-eastwards, where they still held both lines and the switches connecting them. On the latter front the 8th Australian Brigade, which was just taking over the sector, probed Till Trench<sup>18</sup> and found it strongly held. Far on the other flank the 7th and 46th British Divisions attacking Bucquoy on the night of the 13th were repulsed. The staff of the Fifth Army rightly conjectured that it was the bombardment of the R.I line on March 11th which had induced the Germans to withdraw, earlier than they had planned, from the part which the artillery was attacking.

The retirement to the R.II line was due to the Germans correctly apprehending, from the bombardment, that an attack on a major scale was now intended and imminent. Ludendorff was particularly anxious to avoid such an attack, but had till now been uncertain whether one was intended. The 17th Division, on which the attack of the II British Corps had on March 10 fallen, had for some weeks been in no condition to withstand further fighting. The R.I line afforded little deep shelter from bombardment, and there was danger of this division being overwhelmed before the great withdrawal had been carried out. Leave was accordingly given for the "A" (right) group of the First German Army and the right of "B" group (Guard Reserve Corps)<sup>19</sup> to fall back on the R.II line. This retirement was hurriedly ordered, but in carrying it out the Germans were assisted by the fact that, after dusk on the 11th, when their artillery teams were crowded on to the Loupart Plateau to withdraw the guns, the bombardment which had been raging all day suddenly stopped. They were thus able even to take away from a forward position one of their field-guns which had been secretly placed there as protection against tanks. The infantry garrison withdrew at 1 a.m. on the 12th and moved off to rest billets, passing through the support battalions which since midnight had been occupying with a full garrison the R.II line; but the guns were still to keep their barrage-line in front of R.I, which, to deceive the British, was occupied by posts supplied with "large quantities of flare-ammunition" and ordered to stay there, "if possible," during March 12. The Germans in R.II were delighted by the sight of their opponents' shells bursting throughout March 12 on the old trench-line, now held only by the flare-parties. According to German accounts, on the night of the 12th the British advanced "to attack," and the outposts then gave way as ordered. The R.I line was not, however, given up on the height where it crossed the Bapaume road, outposts of the 1st Guard Reserve and 5th Guard Grenadier Regiments being specially directed to hold this position.

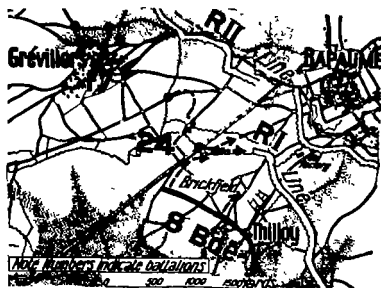
The days following this withdrawal were, on the I Anzac front, occupied by constant efforts to ensure that any signs of the imminence of a further retirement should be immediately discovered and acted upon. The 5th Division in the

<sup>18</sup> With the assistance of men of the outgoing 5th Brigade (*see p 115*).

<sup>19</sup> The two divisions affected near the I Anzac front were the 17th (of "A" group), opposite the II British Corps, and the 1st Guard Reserve (of "B"), partly opposite I Anzac.

southern sector was still largely involved in the muddy conditions of the old battlefield, but the country in which the 2nd Division now worked was almost entirely green, and, though some of the newly-won trenches were in parts waterlogged and the troops had received no rest, the distresses of life in the mud had one by one been cast off like oppressive garments, until men and officers had not merely recovered from the depression of the winter, but were in abnormally high spirits. The 5th and 6th Brigades rapidly advanced some of their posts to within 300 yards of the R.II line north-west of Bapaume, while patrols of the 6th Brigade and 5th Division constantly endeavoured to force an entry into the part of R.I (Till-Atom-Meteor Trench) to which the enemy still clung south-west and south of the town.

Immediately the abandonment of the line near Gréville had been discovered, Gellibrand had put in his 24th Battalion to establish posts immediately north of the main road, while the 21st swept farther to the left around the village. His leadership was producing a particularly active and determined type of junior officer, and these and their men were resolved not again to be accused of the slowness with which he had taxed them in the first phase of the withdrawal. On the night of March 13th the front was readjusted,<sup>20</sup> the 24th Battalion becoming responsible for the whole front of its brigade. Probing with exceptional vigour,<sup>21</sup> its patrols thrust along R.I beyond their brigade's proper boundary, probing close to Bapaume, where they found the enemy holding that line in strength and lost men by his fire. The 8th Brigade was then invited to come into R.I through the 6th and to continue the thrust, which it did, first stationing



<sup>20</sup> The Australian boundary was shifted slightly southwards, the 6th British Brigade taking over the posts of the 17th Battalion (5th Australian Brigade), and the 17th taking over those of the 21st Battalion (6th Australian Brigade) in Gréville, leaving the 24th (6th Brigade) responsible for the line between Gréville and the main Bapaume road.

<sup>21</sup> In the records of the 24th, the patrolling by Lieuts. T. C. Seabrook, G. D. Pollington, J. A. Granter, and G. R. Barclay is particularly mentioned. (Seabrook belonged to Ivanhoe, Vic.; Pollington to Dumosa, Vic.; Granter to Elwood, Vic.; Barclay to Croxton, Vic.).

posts to connect with the "Brickfield" farther back, and on the following night it advanced almost to the short "switch"<sup>22</sup> connecting R.I with R.II. From that point southwards, however, the R.I line, though bombarded during the afternoon of the 14th, was too stoutly held for penetration by patrols.<sup>23</sup>

Conjectures as to the German intentions were confirmed on March 13th by the discovery, apparently in a dugout in Loupart Wood,<sup>24</sup> of two copies of orders of the 1st Guard Reserve Division. One, dated March 11th, contained instructions for the withdrawal of March 11th from R.I. More important was the other, an earlier order of March 5th<sup>25</sup> laying down the procedure of the main retreat to the Hindenburg Line. This showed that it had been intended to carry out the whole retreat from the R.I line to the Hindenburg Line in two main stages. On the "first marching day" (which would follow the thirty-fifth day of preparation) the resting battalions of each regiment would be withdrawn to Cambrai, but the front line (R.I) would still be held till the evening, the support battalions having meanwhile concentrated in R.III (the "Beugny-Ytres Line," three miles beyond Bapaume<sup>26</sup>). After dark—at 9 o'clock—the garrison of R.I would withdraw in rear of R.III, but the forward lines would still be occupied, R.II (in that division's sector) by a small picked rear-guard of about 500 men, 12 machine-guns, and 6 field-guns per division, and R.I by flare-parties from this rear-guard. All next day and the following night the rear-guard was to deceive its enemy, or delay him if he pressed. But early on the third marching day the whole of these troops would retire through another division (called, in the order, the "Siegfried" Division),<sup>27</sup> which would then have been

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<sup>22</sup> Near an outlying "factory."

<sup>23</sup> A party of the 31st Battalion also attempted to get into Till Trench from the front by bombing up "Tongue Trench," but five of its eight men were hit. Several other frontal attempts in the same sector were repulsed.

<sup>24</sup> Previously a headquarters of one of the battalions of the 64th R.I.R.

<sup>25</sup> It was translated and circulated by the British staff some hours after the other. Possibly it was discovered later.

<sup>26</sup> It is now known that the support battalions, rather than freshly rested battalions, were put into this line for two reasons: first, it was desired to avoid congestion, and the sending away of the rested units cleared the area; second, it was thought that fresh troops might be tempted to hold on to this line too long!

<sup>27</sup> It was afterwards found that this merely meant the division holding the Siegfried (Hindenburg) Line behind the retiring troops. The two divisions of the Guard Reserve Corps were to be "squeezed out" by the retirement on the third marching day. The captured order applied to them alone.

brought up to hold the R.III line, and—with outposts—the area in front of it.<sup>28</sup>

The British staff, correctly assuming that this order was genuine, was thus confirmed in its belief that the enemy's retirement would go as deep as the Hindenburg Line. Confirmation would in any case have been received immediately afterwards, inasmuch as on the night of March 13th he began to withdraw from parts of the Fourth Army's front and from his whole salient from Damery to Passel, facing the French. The method of the main withdrawal was now known from the captured order; but the use that could be made of this knowledge depended chiefly upon the solution of the question—which was the "first marching day"? From a clue contained in one paragraph,<sup>29</sup> it must be after March 11th. The withdrawal from Loupart Wood had obviously not been contemplated in the main plan,<sup>30</sup> and it was evident that orders had since been issued modifying that plan—to what extent, was not known. Haig's intelligence staff, however, believed that the withdrawal from R.I had occurred not more than twenty-four hours before the "first marching day," which would thus be the 12th or 13th. If this conjecture was right, and if no vital alteration of plan had since been made, then, at the time when the order was translated, the final withdrawal must be already in progress, and the front line (R.II) would now be held only by the rear-guard, which would be due to retire at 4 a.m. on the 14th or 15th, its artillery having gone an hour earlier.

On the 14th arrived reports that the enemy near Bihucourt (north of Bapaume) had been observed setting fire to some small dumps, and that his garrison appeared to be purposely exposing itself to view; that afternoon the Australians observed what they took to be German shells bursting in

<sup>28</sup> The reader should bear in mind that these arrangements were afterwards altered. They are only important as being information which reached the British.

<sup>29</sup> The rear-guard was to assemble in the village of Morchies before noon on the 10th, and was subsequently to take up its position in the R.II line on the day preceding the first marching day.

<sup>30</sup> The order for it conflicted with that of March 5 in many respects: for example, it directed the garrison of the R.I line to withdraw from that position at 1 a.m. (on the 12th), leaving detachments of its *own* troops "with large quantities of flares" to deceive their enemy. The R.I garrison would retire through the support battalions, then holding the R.II line, and would in turn become the supports, lying in the villages of Beugnâtre and Favreuil close behind the R.II line; the previous support battalions would then be holding the new front line (R.II) and the out-post positions between Gréville and Bapaume.

Bapaume,<sup>31</sup> and the Fourth Army detected the previous night's withdrawal from Pierre St. Vaast Wood.<sup>32</sup> That night all along the I Anzac front patrols made determined attempts to discover if the German garrison had been replaced by a skeleton rear-guard.<sup>33</sup> On the 15th General Gough—probably impelled by the discovered orders—directed that the cavalry of the corps should be warned to prepare for advance, and that the retirement, if it occurred,<sup>34</sup> must be closely followed by small columns of horse, foot, and guns.<sup>35</sup>

In the meantime, in case the Germans held R.II long enough to permit the British artillery to move up and cut the wire, Gough had on March 14th issued orders for a projected offensive with somewhat altered objectives—Achiet-le-Petit and the R.II line north of Bapaume.<sup>36</sup> The main task would now fall on the II Corps, I Anzac having merely to protect the right flank and to probe with patrols the R.II line on either side of Bapaume. To render possible the attack and to assist the patrolling, the artillery was to cut the entanglements by which R.II was thickly protected. To harass the enemy if retiring, the guns of the Fourth and Fifth Armies nightly shelled important crossroads and tracks behind the German lines; but strong Australian patrols which pushed out everywhere on the night of the 15th found the enemy exceptionally alert, with ample machine-guns. The patrols of the 15th Brigade alone had eleven men hit.<sup>37</sup> Directly in front of Bapaume, an enemy bombing party in the early morning attacked a post of the 31st (8th Brigade). The patrols of that battalion heard German waggons coming, as usual, towards

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<sup>31</sup> Possibly the Germans were blowing up houses or stores.

<sup>32</sup> The Germans were seen to shell the wood, and patrols of the British Guards Division afterwards found that a local retirement had begun.

<sup>33</sup> It was expressly ordered by Birdwood that the R.I. line (Till Trench) in front of the 5th Australian Division was not to be occupied until its flanks had been seized, and that the capture of these was to be effected, if possible, by driving the enemy from the trenches by artillery-fire.

<sup>34</sup> According to German records, the Guard Reserve Corps this day ordered its artillery to preserve silence in order to tempt their opponents to imprudence. It is claimed that opposite Bihucourt two companies of British infantry were thus induced to advance without artillery preparation against the R.II line. The artillery of the Guard Reserve Corps and 17th Division then fired two short "crashes," which were believed to have caused much loss. A study of the available British records makes it apparent that the strength of the British attack and the loss suffered are greatly overestimated.

<sup>35</sup> It was suggested that each should consist of a battalion of infantry, a squadron of cavalry, and a battery of field-artillery.

<sup>36</sup> Renewal of the attack on Bucquoy was postponed.

<sup>37</sup> An active leader, Lance-Corporal B. J. Saltau (of Warrnambool, Vic.) was killed.



the line, but observed that the drivers were shouting and making unnecessary noise, apparently to induce the belief that no retirement was in progress.

Nowhere did the belief abate that a retirement was imminent. A carefully reasoned circular<sup>38</sup> of the 2nd Australian Division suggested that "first marching day" was March 15th; this would mean that the German line on the 16th was held only by the rear-guard, which would withdraw at 4 a.m. on the 17th, its artillery retiring at 3. To Gellibrand, who for three weeks had been aching to dislocate the enemy movement by action at some critical moment, it seemed intolerable that this opportunity should be missed. He and his colleague of the 5th Brigade, Brigadier-General R. Smith,<sup>39</sup> laid their heads together and drew up—and sent on to divisional headquarters—an order for a simultaneous attack on the German line by their two brigades at 3 a.m. on the 17th. Throughout the 16th signs were conflicting. The German sniping was in all parts noticeably keen, but during the afternoon an aeroplane of the 3rd British Squadron which flew over R.I (Till Trench) in front of the 5th Division reported that, instead of the hail of machine-gun and rifle-fire usually turned upon probing pilots, only a single shot was fired at it near Gréville. Yet, after dusk, when for the third night in succession strong special patrols of the 5th Australian Division reached the wire of that trench,<sup>40</sup> they were met, as normally, by bombs and machine-gun fire. Patrols sent out at 9 o'clock by order of 2nd Divisional Headquarters brought in similar reports, and, although Gellibrand urged that the machine-gun fire had decreased, General Smyth, a singularly level-headed commander, disallowed the order for the attack, and directed the brigadiers to proceed with the usual patrolling. The reserves which they had moved up for the operation<sup>41</sup> were sent back.

The patrols of the 5th and 6th Brigades observed "a good deal of movement" in the German line early in the night; machine-gun fire was rapid, and 145 flares went up in 105

<sup>38</sup> Signed by Captain W. P. MacCallum.

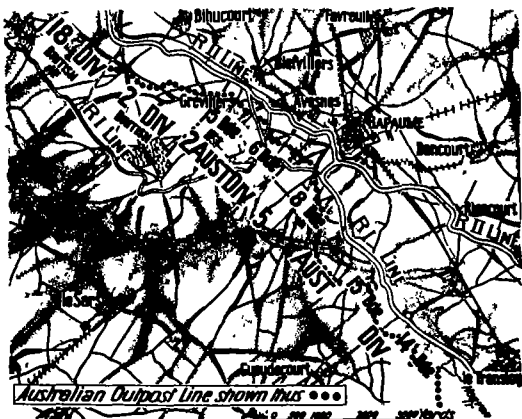
<sup>39</sup> Formerly one of his own trusted battalion commanders. Smith had commanded the 22nd Battalion at Pozières.

<sup>40</sup> This time artillery officers were to be attached, and certain batteries told off to suppress enemy machine-guns, if located.

<sup>41</sup> In the 5th Brigade, it was to have been undertaken by the 18th Battalion, from reserve; in the 6th, by the 23rd, then holding the line.

minutes.<sup>42</sup> At 3.45, however, the flares lessened to one in four minutes, and the firing to a few sniping shots. On this being reported to him at 4.30 a.m., Captain Scott, acting in command of the 19th Battalion (5th Brigade), ordered out two officers' patrols,<sup>43</sup> to thrust through the German wire and report; these left at 5, and at 5.45 their reports, that the trenches were

empty, were received. By 6.15 the two front-line companies<sup>44</sup> were advancing, and by 7 o'clock were through R.II and entering Biefvillers. Eight Germans under a mounted leader were presently seen retiring across country half-a-



mile distant, and shots were fired at them, apparently causing casualties. The 23rd Battalion (6th Brigade) was only a few minutes later. By 7.45 its troops were in Avesnes, the northern suburb of Bapaume. The Germans there had gone.

In the 5th Division the discovery had been made a little earlier. Men of its most southerly battalion, the 53rd (14th Brigade), entered "Heaven Trench," an advanced portion of the R.I defences north-west of Le Transloy, at 4.17, just as an enemy party was leaving it. Patrols of a sister battalion, the 54th, reported R.I (Atom Trench) still held at 5 a.m., but the battalion was in possession of it by 7.45. In the 15th

<sup>42</sup> In the 19th Bn. Captain H. B. Taylor (of Longueville, N.S.W.) had observers counting the flares throughout the night, and also watching the points from which machine-guns fired. It was observed that both the flares and the apparent machine-gun positions grew fewer as the night advanced. It was also noticed that, when the Germans saw a patrol, they blew four blasts of a whistle, and a machine-gun in the neighbourhood then opened fire. Flares with a strange red glow were lighted at the "Monument" (known, from the captured order, to be headquarters of the rear party of the 64th R.I.R.) and were answered by a similar flare elsewhere. At 3.20 and 3.50 explosions and fires broke out.

<sup>43</sup> Under Lieuts. F. O. Robinson (of Manly, N.S.W.) and D. H. Avaré (of East Maitland, N.S.W.; killed in action on 3 May, 1917).

<sup>44</sup> Under Captain H. B. Taylor and Captain G. L. Sadler (of Hurstville, N.S.W.).

Brigade the left battalion (58th) reported signs of evacuation at 5.15 a.m., and had troops in R.I (Till Trench) by 6 a.m.; those of the right battalion (57th) were there by 6.45.

Opposite Bapaume lay the 8th Brigade; its 30th (New South Wales) Battalion had at midnight relieved the 31st (Queensland and Victoria), on which the strain of preserving contact with the enemy had fallen heavily.<sup>45</sup> A warning had been received to keep close touch, as the withdrawal seemed imminent; the enemy was then firing machine-guns and throwing many flares, and the patrols reported the line held, but not, they thought, in strength. At 3.40 a small attack was ordered on the left against the German barricade in the switch between R.I and R.II. After the Stokes mortars had fired a dozen rounds, a small party<sup>46</sup> bombed 150 yards up the trench, but found it empty, though some of the flare cartridges in it were still hot. At 4.30 the party halted and built a barricade. Till this hour German machine-guns were especially active, ripping the earth off the Australian parapets, but shortly afterwards a patrol on the right, under Corporal J. H. King,<sup>47</sup> entered R.I (Till). Learning of this about 6 o'clock, Lieutenant-Colonel Clark ordered a general advance, but, on being reminded of the activity of the machine-guns, agreed to send forward patrols first. They went out at 6.30, and found the enemy gone. The three front-line companies of the 30th then advanced in artillery formation, still preceded by their scouts, over the 1,200 yards of open crest intervening between them and the old town. Its high ramparts and deep moat, now grown with grass and trees, appeared a formidable obstacle if any rear party had held them, but they were silent, and Lieutenant White<sup>48</sup> of the centre company, racing one of his N.C.O's, was the first to enter Bapaume. Shortly after 7.15 the left and centre companies had reached the main

<sup>45</sup> This battalion had pressed the Germans back to the switch (near the "Factory" between R.I and R.II, immediately in front of Bapaume), but there the resistance became most stubborn.

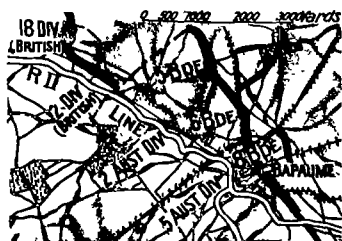
<sup>46</sup> Of Captain Cheeseman's company. The party included Captain T. C. Barbour. Sergeant A. H. McL. Forbes, and Corporal D. Smith. Smith worked in the open beside the trench. (Cheeseman belonged to Newcastle, N.S.W.; Barbour to Melbourne; Forbes to Wallsend, N.S.W.; Smith to Glebe Point, N.S.W.)

<sup>47</sup> Of the right company, commanded by Lieut. J. C. Rickard—of Ryde, N.S.W. (Lieut. J. H. King, 30th Bn. Theological student—Chairman of the Congregational Union of N.S.W., 1931/32. Of Croydon, N.S.W.; b. Warren, N.S.W., 21 May, 1889.)

<sup>48</sup> Capt. A. C. White, M.C.; 30th Bn. Medical student, of Auburn, N.S.W.; b. Kogarah, N.S.W., 24 June, 1894.

Péronne road running along the heights through the town. At its junction with the high road to Cambrai was a huge crater, recently blown, which they occupied. A large proportion of the houses had evidently been blown down by the Germans in the last few days,<sup>49</sup> and many were burning, the smoke rendering it difficult to see down the streets.

Captain Barbour of the left company, keeping his main body in the Rue de Péronne, again sent forward patrols. One moved swiftly through the north of the town,<sup>50</sup> where touch was quickly gained in the same street with an officer of Gellibrand's brigade.<sup>51</sup> It was reported that other patrols were shot at from houses, but at 10.30 a.m. Captain Cheeseman<sup>52</sup> ordered an advance through the town. The lingering enemy posts were dislodged by moving men down other streets. As Cheeseman's company emerged into the green intact country beyond, these Germans, who had well carried out their work, were seen scampering across the open; they were fired on, and sent to ground. With intense exhilaration the leading platoons broke into skirmishing order and, for the first time advancing as in open warfare, reached their allotted position 700 yards beyond Bapaume. The fringe of Germans retired before them. Far in the distance other bodies of troops and transport were seen slowly disappearing to the east.



It is convenient here to lift the veil from a few vital facts of which the British were unaware throughout these operations. First, the German withdrawal had been intended to begin on March 16. This was fixed as the "first marching day," and, as things turned out, was the date on which the main movement and the final demolitions were begun. The retirement in front of the Fifth Army on February 23, like that from Loupart Wood on March 11, formed no part of the original "Alberich" plan. The intention had been to hold the "winter" line<sup>53</sup> right up to the first marching day, while the country

<sup>49</sup> See Vol XII, plates 294-7.

<sup>50</sup> One of its members, Pte. R. N. French (of Merriwa, N.S.W.), was shot dead on the Vaulx-Vraucourt road, beyond Bapaume.

<sup>51</sup> Lieut. C. D. Fethers, M.C.; 23rd Bn. Bank manager; of Elsternwick, Vic.; b. Malvern, Vic., 20 May, 1887.

<sup>52</sup> Lieut.-Col. W. J. R. Cheeseman, D.S.O. M.C. Commanded 53rd Bn., 1917/18. Business manager, of Newcastle, N.S.W.; b. Newcastle, 12 Jan., 1894. Died, 23 April, 1938.

<sup>53</sup> See p. 127

behind was being cleared of useful material and the Hindenburg Line hurried to completion, and then to retire in one movement—not, as the British staff was led to believe, in a series of gradual stages.<sup>64</sup> The successive defence lines were for use in that single movement, or in emergency. Ludendorff, though fairly certain that neither Russia nor Italy would strike before the German Army had completed its readjustment, and though, from mid-February, well-informed as to the French intentions, was in constant apprehension of an offensive at the crucial point, on the Somme, where the Allies had the necessary artillery and material crowded ready for action at any time. "Fighting with the British had never quite come to a standstill," he writes; and "the situation . . . was so tense that we had to be prepared for an earlier attack." Although the laying bare of the fifteen-kilometre zone was a measure of high military importance, Ludendorff was prepared to forgo it and carry out an earlier withdrawal rather than suffer an early offensive in that region.

By making two preliminary withdrawals in the crater-field before Bapaume, the Crown Prince Rupprecht almost certainly averted the need for a premature retirement to the Hindenburg Line. These earlier withdrawals were forced upon Prince Rupprecht by the fact that part of his troops had reached the limit of their endurance. The divisions opposed to the Fifth British Army had received little rest during the winter. Those of Group "B,"<sup>65</sup> controlled by the Guard Reserve Corps, had at the end of January all been in the line for at least six weeks, the two Guard divisions actually for twelve and thirteen.<sup>66</sup> Each had been holding the front with all three regiments in line, a system which during the worst of the winter had only been rendered possible by the loan of the three regiments of the 2nd Marine Division and one from the 223rd.<sup>67</sup> But about January 18 these regiments and, at the end of the month, the 214th Division, were withdrawn.<sup>68</sup> The holding of the line with a reduced garrison had been facilitated by a minor withdrawal to a so-called "winter line," involving the abandonment of small salients north of Gueudecourt and west of Le Transloy. The movement, though long contemplated, had in the end been carried out hastily, on January 27, after the successful attack by the British 29th Division near Le Transloy; and a much wider No-Man's Land had thus been left, in certain parts, between the German and the British lines.<sup>69</sup> The German corps

<sup>64</sup> The time to be taken by this movement depended on the distance the Germans had to go. North of the Somme it would occupy only one day. In front of the Fourth British Army, it would occupy two; in front of the French, three.

<sup>65</sup> In January, 1917 these were the 1st Guard Reserve, 4th Guard, 214th, and 4th Ersatz Divisions.

<sup>66</sup> The 4th Guard Division had gone into the line on Oct. 30, and the 1st Guard Reserve Division on Nov. 6.

<sup>67</sup> Each division was thus given an extra regiment. The divisions split them up and allotted to each of their own regiments an extra battalion; each regiment was thus able to hold its front with one battalion in the firing line, a second in support, and a third in reserve; the fourth was sent to a back area for rest and training.

<sup>68</sup> Its sector was taken over by the 4th Guard and 4th Ersatz Divisions, each extending their inner flank. Each of the three divisions then remaining still contrived to keep one battalion resting at Cambrai.

<sup>69</sup> The Guard Reserve Corps, following the policy to which, in general, it stoutly adhered, had been stubbornly opposed to the giving up of any line. As long before as Nov. 3, its predecessor had been asked to select a more safe and comfortable line for holding during the winter. The army staff had, for example, suggested that the Butte of Warlencourt and the neighbouring quarry should be evacuated, but the 1st Guard Reserve Division had pressed so strongly for keeping these positions that the Guard Reserve Corps was eventually allowed to retain most of its line and

commander had next, on February 1, been asked which of his divisions most needed relief. In reply, he had indicated both Guard divisions. Nothing further, however, had been done in the matter, when, on February 7, the preliminary order for the great retirement reached "B" Group Headquarters—and with it all hope of early rest vanished. There could be no thought of divisional reliefs, it was intimated, until the plan of withdrawal had been carried through.

The preparations were to begin on February 9, and—though the actual "marching days" were not yet determined—would last about five weeks, by which time the Hindenburg Line must be ready for occupation. It was laid down as a matter of the greatest importance that the existing front line should be held until the Siegfried Line was ready.

The first preparatory movements in the rear area had begun on February 9,<sup>60</sup> the artillery workshops, till then established in the village of Hermies, nine miles east of Bapaume, being withdrawn behind the new line. But at the end of the first week of preparation an event had occurred which rendered precarious the German tenure of the line near the Ancre. This was the attack by the II British Corps on February 17 against the 17th German Division south-west of Pys. Only a fortnight before the II Corps had seized the German line overlooking Grandcourt,<sup>61</sup> and forced the abandonment of that village and a readjustment of the German front. Although the Germans were (as already stated) forewarned of the second attack, and tried to parry with counter-measures, its effect was far-reaching. The 17th and 18th German Divisions could stand no more pressure, and—in view of the intimation that no divisions could be spared for reliefs—the army commander<sup>62</sup> and Crown Prince Rupprecht were forced to consider a withdrawal of this part of their front to the R.I. line. The Guard Reserve Corps—the morale of whose troops was high—fought tooth and nail against this proposal. Its staff rightly judged that no big operation was imminent on its front.<sup>63</sup> A heavy bombardment on February 8 had caused considerable damage to its trenches, batteries, and ammunition dumps, but this portended only local attacks on The Maze and Stormy Trench. The voluntary

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merely evacuate a few salients. Corps headquarters informed the army staff that the "winter line" would be ready for occupation by Jan. 20, but this was not the case, and the date for its occupation was therefore postponed to Feb. 1. On Jan. 27, however, the 29th Division's attack took place, with the result that the Germans hurried on the occupation of the winter line that night, and withdrew their old line of forward posts. This explains why Finch and Orion Trenches were found vacant by patrols of the 5th Australian Division, which was to have attacked them on Feb. 4; and why, about Feb. 7, patrols of the 12th Brigade discovered the area adjoining Fritz's Folly to have been abandoned by the enemy.

<sup>60</sup> The first of the days of preparation (known in the order as "A" days). The 35th would thus be March 15.

<sup>61</sup> This attack had been carried out by the Hawke and Hood Battalions, 63rd Division (Royal Naval Division). Their losses were considerable, amounting to nearly 700.

<sup>62</sup> General Fritz von Below.

<sup>63</sup> It is true that some officers held that there were signs of a coming attack. The author of the *History of the 1st Guard Reserve F.A. Regiment* remarks, among other points, that the raid by the 15th (Scottish) Division on the Butte and Quarry, and the appearance on that front of the 1st and 2nd Australian Divisions ("whom the British were glad to employ, as the French did their negroes, in difficult and costly enterprises"), were signs of the imminence of an attack. The second "sign" is almost certainly an after-thought, and the comment a piece of post-war propaganda. The two Australian divisions were shock troops, and were used as such; but they were certainly not more so than the 15th (Scottish) Division, whose place they took, and their movement on this occasion was unrelated to any coming offensive.



13 IN DAPARME

Supports of the 30th Battalion on the Cambrai road, 17th March, 1917

*Aust War Memorial Official Photo No E361*

*To face p. 128*



14. A MOUNTED PATROL PASSING THROUGH BAPAUME, 19TH MARCH, 1917

*Aust War Memorial Official Photo No E384*

*To face p. 129*



abandonment of the front line would dislocate the artillery and dispirit the troops, who, if they became aware that their occupation of the new line (R.I) was to be only temporary, might lose the determination to defend it to the utmost. If the British discovered this weakness, they might be tempted to attack on a large scale. Finally, the Guard divisions were capable of holding their present line—why should not the 17th and 18th do so?

The army commander saw the force of these contentions, but realised that the 17th and 18th Divisions simply could not hold. As an alternative to withdrawal, an appeal was made to the higher command for troops to infuse among them, but, on this being refused, the withdrawal to R.I was on February 19 ordered.

Such were the reasons for the first retirement. It was forced on the enemy by the fact that his front-line troops were weakening under Haig's battering on the Somme,<sup>64</sup> and its only connection with the greater withdrawal which was to begin three weeks later lay in the fact that, if the larger movement had not been in preparation, the enemy, instead of abandoning the line, might have devoted part of his scanty reserve to holding it. The most important effect of the premature withdrawal—an effect apparently not realised by the German leaders—was that it destroyed the secrecy of their intentions. In its very first stage, German prisoners gave ample information of at least the outlines of the "Alberich" plan.

The only events which caused anxiety to the German staff after the first premature withdrawal were the two successful assaults—after full artillery preparation—on Malt Trench (March 2) and Gréville's Trench (March 10), and the evident preparations for a third and more powerful "full dress" attack upon the R.I line at Loupart Wood. But on March 11, when the bombardment for this third operation began to fall, there remained only six days before the final withdrawal of the whole front between Arras and the Aisne. In deciding to avoid the impending attack by falling back from R.I. (Loupart Wood) to R.II (Bapaume), the German command was well aware that in so short a time it was impossible for the British to stage a "full dress" attack against the well-wired trenches of the Bapaume line. Consequently both Crown Prince Rupprecht and the staff of the Guard Reserve Corps record that, from the moment of the retirement of March 11, they had no further fear for the success of the whole operation.

The Germans were unaware of the extent to which the British had discovered their plans, but they noted that the British appeared to be well-informed, and German officers were accordingly warned to maintain the utmost secrecy. The documents captured by the British in Loupart Wood were not as valuable as was assumed by the British at the time. The most important of them—the German order of March 5—had been cancelled on March 8; and the altered arrangements then made had again been modified on March 15 by a final order

<sup>64</sup> It is remarkable that Ludendorff's *My War Memories*, usually so accurate and detailed, contains no reference to this phase of the withdrawal.

in accordance with which the main withdrawal was eventually carried out. Through the courtesy of the *Reichsarchiv*, it is now known that on the front of the Australians the final withdrawal proceeded as follows.

The front line facing the Australians was fully held by infantry until 1.30 a.m. on March 17 (second marching day), although half the artillery had been withdrawn behind R.III two days before and the remaining half, except a few guns, had gone by midnight on the 16th. At 1.30 on the 17th the main garrisons withdrew,<sup>65</sup> but left patrols of their own troops to keep up the appearance of occupation by firing rifles and machine-guns<sup>66</sup> at intervals and throwing flares until "just before dawn." In order to safeguard the 4th Guard Division in its difficult task of withdrawing through Bapaume, half the support battalion of the 5th Guard Grenadier manned the trenches about the ramparts of Bapaume at 1.30 a.m., and held on there until 3.30.<sup>67</sup> Moreover all the patrols of the Guard Reserve Corps in the front line had been made strong enough "to hold their own till 3.30 a.m. against enemy patrols of some strength." They then retired through the rear-guard detachments which were defending, not the R.II line, but a belt of wire and unfinished trench three-quarters of a mile east of Bapaume known as the "R.IIa" or "Barbarossa" line.<sup>68</sup> Behind it were the three support battalions of each division with their allotment of artillery holding the R.III (Beugny-Ytres) line,<sup>69</sup> and the withdrawn front-line battalions billeted in villages close behind it. From 11 a.m. on the 17th onwards the "Siegfried" divisions would be in position in the Hindenburg Line.

During the operations of that morning in and about Bapaume, the Australians believed that they were pressing and hustling the enemy. Yet the Germans suffered no inconvenience except that of being cautiously but closely followed.

A summary of German records states: "The enemy (*i.e.*, I Anzac Corps) noticed the withdrawal about 8.30 a.m. Very cautiously he felt forward with patrols. About 10 a.m. Bapaume, Riencourt, Beaulencourt, and Le Transloy were occupied (by the Australians) with small forces. . . . Bapaume, besides being mined, had been set alight in 400 different places."

<sup>65</sup> The right of the Guard Reserve Corps was to withdraw a little earlier, in order to conform with the 17th Division on its right.

<sup>66</sup> In the III/5 Guard Grenadier Regiment, each of three companies left a strong patrol with a machine-gun.

<sup>67</sup> They then joined the other two companies of the battalion in R.III.

<sup>68</sup> Approximately the line of villages Favreuil-Bancourt-Haplincourt-Barastre.

<sup>69</sup> In a divisional sector (that of the 1st Guard Reserve Division) the heavy motor-drawn batteries had retired beyond the Hindenburg Line between March 11 and 13, the 5.9-inch howitzers between March 14 and 16. Two batteries of 4.2-inch long range guns withdrew behind the R.III line on the 5th and 9th of March respectively. The equivalent of a British brigade of field artillery and one battery of 5.9-inch howitzers withdrew behind R.III on March 15, forming the main artillery of the divisional rear-guard. The rest of the artillery remained covering the front line until the night of March 16, when it withdrew before midnight, the heavy batteries retiring behind the Hindenburg Line and the field artillery going temporarily into billets behind R.III (at Demicourt). Six field-guns remained until 1.30 a.m. on the 17th, keeping up a lively fire by shooting off their spare ammunition. They then withdrew, leaving the fire to be taken up by the guns covering the rear-guard detachment in the Barbarossa Line, and by the batteries covering R.III.

Some critics have held that the British command and staff are much to blame for not having shattered the German movement either at this or at some other stage. A former officer of the German Army, for example, Rudolf Binding, has written:<sup>70</sup>

**Subsequent  
criticism**

It is an eternal shame for the English that this operation cost us no losses.

By the French Army any opportunity of turning it to advantage was missed for the reason that Nivelle, although warned by the French Intelligence service as well as by the British, refused to believe that the movement would extend to his front. Haig, on the other hand, was convinced as to the enemy's intention. But though many British officers and men felt that either before or during the retirement there must be moments when they might catch the enemy "standing on one foot," and when a strong timely thrust would upset him, yet neither Haig nor his army commanders were attracted by the notion of rushing in; and study of this and other planned withdrawals during the Great War will probably induce the reader to support Haig's view. He believed—and the events already described justify his belief—that under the conditions of the Western Front the only effective method of attacking the enemy before or during withdrawal, as at other times, was that of "full dress" assault after careful artillery preparation. If the withdrawal was to be turned to advantage, such an attack must be delivered immediately before or at the moment of withdrawal—that is, during those days or hours in which the enemy's defensive organisation was weakened by the retirement of part of his artillery or infantry.

But the hours when this weakening would occur must be discovered either through circumstantial evidence obtained by observation and patrolling, or through direct statements from prisoners, captured documents, or spies. Patrols, however, no matter how brave and clever, and even if supported by the most perfect system of communication and intelligence, could hardly hope to discover—and in fact never did discover—a decrease of the German strength in time to permit of a "full dress" attack being prepared before the enemy had withdrawn.

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<sup>70</sup> In *A Fatalist at War*, p. 152

The only sure sign for which they could seek was some change due to the withdrawal of part of his infantry<sup>71</sup>—either main garrison or rear parties.

The original withdrawal on February 23rd had not been expected and, despite good patrolling, was not followed by the Australians for nearly forty-eight hours. But from that moment a continuance of the withdrawal was expected. If, therefore, it is a feasible military task to discover such a movement in time to harass it or turn it into disaster, the opportunity now occurred. The efforts of the Australian patrols became increasingly tense. In spite of this, the retirement of March 11th-12th was not discovered until nearly twenty-four hours after the main German garrison had withdrawn. On the night preceding the final withdrawal of March 17th, according to a report of the 2nd Division, several Australian scouts actually lay under the wire-entanglements of the R.II line, "so anxious were the men that the enemy should not get away without our knowing it." On that occasion the Australians never really lost touch with the enemy's covering troops, and both then and on March 12th they were much before any neighbouring units in discovering the movement. But even on March 17th the enemy's main garrison had gone some hours before the suspicions of the Australian scouts were generally reported. The change which was then observed was caused by the departure, not of the main garrison, but of the last German patrols. It was detected almost at once; but at so late a stage the information could lead to no useful action beyond that of closely following with light forces the German retirement.

These results were not unexpected by the British staff;<sup>72</sup> indeed, it was upon a full realisation of these very difficulties by General White in 1915 that the plans for the evacuation of Anzac and Suvla had been based. It was, of course, just possible that prisoners, documents, or spies might have disclosed the date and hour of the withdrawal in time for a "full dress attack to be prepared and to be launched when

<sup>71</sup> Signs of a withdrawal of artillery were much too vague to permit of immediate discovery of the movement.

<sup>72</sup> For example, after a staff exercise of the 4th (British) Division in March 1914, Colonel J. E. Edmonds (now Brig.-General Sir James Edmonds, Official Historian of the B.E.F.) wrote: "With modern arms a force can withdraw, or break off a battle, any time it likes; during daylight by a sacrifice of a small part; at night without any loss whatsoever."

the enemy's artillery was withdrawing. This information, however, did not arrive. The utmost, therefore, that Haig and his army commanders could do was to arrange for the delivery of such attacks at the earliest possible moment. Many British officers expected that Haig, when the Germans were first discovered to be retiring, would at once strike with the southern flank of Allenby's Third Army against the northern hinge of the movement. That measure was indeed mooted, but was rejected upon Allenby's representing that, to be effective, it must take a form practically identical with his impending Arras-Vimy offensive, which it was most undesirable to disturb, and which could not be launched in full force until April 8th. The Fifth Army, on the other hand, although its original plans were dislocated, was free to strike as soon as an assault on the enemy's new line could be prepared. This it did twice with success, disturbing the enemy's plan, although the effect was minimised through the Germans twice avoiding by retreat Gough's projected major blow<sup>73</sup> to which these two strokes were intended to be preliminary.

What other fully prepared action the Fifth Army could have taken is not easy to discover. There remained the possibility of attacking the enemy at those moments at which alone a less fully prepared attack had some chance of success. This could be only when the German line was held by light rear parties immediately after the main garrison and artillery had withdrawn. By a lucky conjecture, based on the cancelled German orders, the 2nd Australian Division guessed approximately the time of the final German withdrawal, and if Generals Gellibrand and Smith had been allowed to make their attempt at 3 o'clock on the 17th, as they desired, their column would have been faced only by the strong patrols left behind by the departing garrison with orders to hold out until 3.30. It is possible that some of these might have been captured and passing alarm caused, although the darkness would have limited the result. The rear-guard, farther back, could not have been broken through, and sharp losses might have been suffered.

That interesting experiment had remained unmade. The British action throughout, therefore, was confined to the

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<sup>73</sup> That is, the attack projected by the Fifth Army, first against the defences of Loupart Wood, and later against the R.II line.

delivery of formal attacks whenever time was sufficient for their preparation, and to keeping touch with the enemy, following him closely but cautiously with forces as light as possible, passing the remainder into reserve and steadily proceeding with preparation for the Arras offensive.<sup>74</sup>

This cautious policy was justified. It is true that there were many temptations to take greater risks. Australian commanders knew that the Germans, retiring at their chosen time, could easily baffle small scouting parties, refusing to fire on them until they were close at hand and then driving them off without disclosing more than a few machine-gun posts. Under disciplined control the enemy might even refuse to fire at probing aeroplanes, and the only means of making him immediately show whether his line was held strongly or by weak posts might be to make a show of a more powerful advance on a wide front, in which case all the German posts would probably open fire. This method entailed risk of incurring losses, but such risk is inseparable from war, and, with Australian troops, always ready to take a risk for a worthy object, a policy of merely avoiding loss would have involved sheer waste of their finest quality. What was required was that risk should not be incurred except when the object was worth it and all possible care had been taken to ensure success. During the German withdrawal a less patient attitude than Haig's would probably have led, as did Gellibrand's attacks on Malt Trench, to severe casualties at the hands of a few German machine-gunners without any compensating advantage.<sup>75</sup> There emerges the interesting conclusion that Zeki Bey and his Turkish colleagues at Anzac were right:<sup>76</sup> that an opponent's carefully pre-planned withdrawal from a strongly-held trench-line does not—even if expected and eagerly watched for—offer a favourable opportunity for hastily attacking him, and that the most that can effectively be done is to "make a demonstration" and follow cautiously. Without a lucky accident, it is probably impossible to discover the critical moment of a well-arranged enemy withdrawal.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Certain precautions which Haig thought necessary against possible counter-attack in Flanders are, however, more difficult to justify. See pp. 138-9.

<sup>75</sup> The German losses in these were certainly insignificant.

<sup>76</sup> See Vol. II, p. 904.

<sup>77</sup> The moral drawn from these operations by General Gough and his staff was: "A few men with machine-guns posted behind good wire-entanglements will hold up the attack of an army until the wire has been cut. Cutting the wire entails bringing up guns and ammunition, which causes delay, and makes rapid advance very difficult."

The direct results of the exceptional foreknowledge gained through the premature withdrawal of February 23rd were, therefore, insignificant. The indirect results are more difficult to measure. The considerable saving of divisions and of artillery which Haig effected by thinning out his line as soon as the operation began, and their transfer to the area of the coming offensive, were doubtless facilitated by his understanding of the plan. A less ponderable effect was that upon his relations with Nivelle, which, in the three weeks of the retirement, suffered a double crisis. Allusion has already been made<sup>78</sup> to Haig's refusal to swallow the whole of Nivelle's plan so far as it concerned the English. Haig did not realise the exasperation which this refusal caused. When difficulties arose, as, for example, through the congestion of the Nord railway, which threatened to render it impossible for the British offensive at Arras to be punctually undertaken, he found Nivelle anxious to meet his views; the cordial manner of the French commander at these interviews gave him no hint that Nivelle considered that he was being thwarted by the British commander's independence, but Nivelle expressed to his Government views which he had not the strength to express to Haig.

At this juncture, Nivelle being apparently unable to ensure the service of trains that had been promised,<sup>79</sup> Haig, as Nivelle had previously done,<sup>80</sup> appealed to his Government, and a second conference was arranged, to take place on February 26th at Calais. This meeting, at which the railway difficulty was at once referred to a committee of experts, gave to Lloyd George an opportunity to attempt the settlement of a much more important question—that of the supreme command of the Allies on the Western Front. It seems certain that Lloyd George had heard from the French Government of Nivelle's complaints that Haig would not concur in certain proposals, and in this trouble Lloyd George strongly sympathised with the French. His natural lack of sympathy

<sup>78</sup> See pp. 11-12.

<sup>79</sup> This congestion endangered even the regular supply of the front. On February 2 representations by Major General Sir Eric Geddes, Director-General of Transportation, had been laid before Nivelle, who appointed a commission of general staff and engineers to deal with the matter, but trouble continued, and Geddes informed Haig that there was danger of complete breakdown.

<sup>80</sup> Before the conference in London on Jan 15-16 (see p. 12)

with Haig's qualities has already been referred to.<sup>81</sup> He did not believe Haig capable of directing to full advantage the British effort in the field, and wished to see that power transferred to a leader of quicker and more imaginative intelligence. He sympathised with the desire of the French Government and people to achieve unity of aim by having the British Army placed under the French Commander-in-Chief. It has, indeed, been freely suggested that he hoped that Haig, if the change was forced upon him, would resign. It was almost certain, however, that the open supersession of Haig would have caused a crisis in the British nation, the army, and the Cabinet.

These circumstances led Lloyd George to take one of the rashest steps of his career<sup>82</sup>—the rushing through of this change in the command. Without the presence of Sir William Robertson,<sup>83</sup> the British War Cabinet on February 24th decided that the British armies in France should be placed under Nivelle, forming an army group similar to the three other great groups (of the French Army) on the Western Front; but neither this decision nor the communications with the French which preceded and followed it were disclosed to Haig or Robertson, who thus came to the Calais meeting on February 26th in entire ignorance of what was intended. The French delegates, on the other hand, were aware that the matter would be raised, but at the meeting, Haig being present, Nivelle denied that there had been any general disagreement with him. It was only on being pressed by the British Prime Minister that he produced a scheme already prepared by which the British Expeditionary Force would be placed under his command as far as operations were concerned, and his orders to the several British armies were to be issued, not through Haig, but direct through a British chief-of-the-staff working at G.Q.G. This proposal came as a surprise and a shock to Haig and Robertson, and, as Lloyd George afterwards explained to them, went beyond the British War Cabinet's intention; but, after a tussle lasting till next day, a less far-reaching agreement was arrived at,

<sup>81</sup> *P.* 13.

<sup>82</sup> For evidence of its rashness see *pp.* 408-9, 548-51.

<sup>83</sup> Chief of the Imperial General Staff. He had been told that his presence was not necessary.



binding Haig to act under Nivelle's orders during the impending offensive, unless those orders seemed to imperil unduly the British Army.<sup>84</sup> In that case Haig must report his divergent action, and the reason for it, to the British Government.

Thus in thirty-six hours a settlement, such as it was, had been hurried through, placing the British Army, and with it the Australian and other dominion forces in France, under the new French leader. Its success obviously depended upon Nivelle having the confidence of the troops and commanders of both armies, a condition rendered impossible—if by nothing else—by the manner in which the reform had been inaugurated. Only a supreme crisis could have justified such haste. It is true that the "New Army," both of Britain and of the dominions, would—if "camp talk" is a criterion—have welcomed a well thought-out scheme for united control, and even the regular army, in spite of the deeply ingrained pride of an old and splendid service, might have suppressed its mortification if Nivelle had been a known and trusted leader, and if the change had been frankly made. The attempt to rush it through merely resulted in adding to the difficulties of the moment a dangerous tension between the two commanders and their staffs, and rendering impossible such co-operation as had occurred throughout 1916.<sup>85</sup>

It will be observed that this conference occurred at the moment when the British command had discovered the German withdrawal on part of the British front. On the day after the meeting a further crisis was occasioned by Haig's receiving a letter in which Nivelle somewhat peremptorily ordered him to proceed with the arrangements for executing the plan already explained to him:

The first objective of the British Armies is Cambrai. . . . The date on which they should be ready to launch their attacks . . . is April 8th.

Haig was possibly the only Allied commander-in-chief big enough to overlook any purely personal diminution of his dignity, provided that the cause of his country gained thereby.

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<sup>84</sup> French commanders served under a similar condition in Gallipoli.

<sup>85</sup> Until this meeting at Calais, Haig was entirely unaware of any tension between himself and Nivelle, but some evidence of Nivelle's exasperation may have reached Sir William Robertson, who on February 14 had advised Haig to settle the railway troubles with Nivelle direct instead of referring to the Government. At the Calais meeting Haig pointed out that the relations between the two armies were now "thoroughly friendly" and added that, in his opinion, the staffs at G.H.Q. were more at home together than at any time in his experience in the past two years.

But in this case he genuinely believed that his country would be endangered by his immediate compliance with the order. He had already discovered strong evidence that the German withdrawal would extend from Laon to Arras—or even Lille—and, if it did so, the situation might be totally changed. The Germans would avoid the projected strokes by Gough's army and the French Northern Group. Even at Arras and Vimy he might find himself striking a blow in the air, and, while his reserves were uselessly committed to battle on that front, the Germans might deliver elsewhere the counter-stroke which he strongly suspected to be part of their plan.

It is true that there were soon observed signs that this counter-offensive would not be launched in the region of the German withdrawal—the Germans would hardly be devastating a region which they intended to recapture. But into Belgium large German reserves were known to have been flowing,<sup>86</sup> and, although there were no signs of abnormal enemy works or concentration of guns, and Haig considered that the probabilities were against his being attacked there, nevertheless he feared the possibility, that sector being always a sensitive spot in the British defence. The British Expeditionary Force, he felt, could not be safe unless he secured his flank there, and he decided to arrange rapidly to reinforce it, if need be, by divisions saved from the Fifth Army's front. Subject to this, and to the necessity of diverting some of his labour units to work upon the Ypres defences, he would for the time being press on with all possible strength the preparations for his part in Nivelle's plan. But "some reduction (he wrote) in the scale of my preparations, or extra time to complete them, will, I fear, be unavoidable, and, if the situation develops unfavourably for the proposed offensive, it may become necessary to abandon it."

He accordingly on March 2nd addressed to the British Government a memorandum stating—

On present indications I consider that the safety of the British armies might be gravely imperilled if I were to commit my forces beyond recall to any enterprise which would deprive me of the power to meet developments which appear to me possible, and perhaps even probable. . . .

and fully explaining his reasons. A copy of this he also

<sup>86</sup> These were the troops actually sent there as a precaution against the possibility that the Dutch might declare war on Germany in consequence of the reopening of the submarine campaign.

forwarded to Nivelles on March 4th, together with a letter explaining that he had delayed his answer in order to study the possibilities arising out of the enemy's retirement. He added that, pending the receipt of Nivelles's views, he would proceed with the Arras-Vimy preparations, but he was doubtful whether it would now be feasible to make Cambrai the objective or to complete the preparations by April 8th.

Nivelles did not believe that the German retirement would extend to his front; but even if it did he saw no reason for abandoning the main part of his plan and allowing the initiative to pass to the enemy. He pointed out ("quite fairly," as Sir William Robertson says<sup>87</sup>) that there was as yet no definite evidence that the Germans would attack anywhere. His outlook extended to the whole front, and he pointed out that several other sectors of the Allies' line were as likely to be attacked as was the British left. It does indeed appear that—as almost inevitably happened even with the best leaders—Haig's judgment had been affected by his special concern for and knowledge of his own sector, and that on this—the main issue between them—the judgment of the supreme commander was sounder than that of the sectional one.<sup>88</sup> The plan of the British attack, Nivelles said, could be modified to suit the new situation, the divisions saved from Gough's army being used to reinforce the attack at Arras. Less well-grounded—and still inexplicable to British students—was Nivelles's strong opposition to Haig's project of attacking Vimy Ridge.<sup>89</sup>

To Nivelles, urgently pushing on with the preparations of his great plan, the attitude of Haig appeared disobedient and his doubts almost sacrilegious. As Haig's memorandum was addressed to the British Government and questioned not

<sup>87</sup> *Soldiers and Statesmen*, Vol. II, p. 219. Sir Henry Wilson also (see Callwell's life of him, Vol. I, p. 330) was not impressed by Haig's view.

<sup>88</sup> The point is an important one, for in this natural tendency of all soldiers except the supreme commander to regard with undue anxiety the particular front with which they were concerned lay the chief reason—and full justification—for the ultimate adoption in 1918 of the system of united command. Few even of the most broadminded and intelligent leaders, whether in high or low command, could maintain a perfect sense of proportion as to the relative importance of what was happening or threatening to happen on their own front. There were, it is true, many instances of wide breadth of view—those, for example, of General Murray in Egypt (see Vol. III, p. 297) and General Gouraud in Gallipoli (Vol. II, note at p. 439). Gouraud's attitude, however, was afterwards modified. In general it was found that only a supreme commander could maintain fair and constant judgment as to the needs of various sectors of an extensive front.

<sup>89</sup> Haig wisely insisted upon this, first, to protect his flank in the offensive and, second, because the German withdrawal was unlikely to extend to this valuable position.

merely the details of the plan, but the practicability of the whole offensive, Nivelle passed his copy of it to the French Government with the not unnatural request that it should insist with the British Cabinet upon Haig's being brought to heel. A third conference was accordingly arranged, this time in London on March 12th and 13th. Immediately before the meeting some attempt was made to get Nivelle to press for Haig's dismissal, but he indignantly refused.<sup>90</sup> Instead, under the wise guidance of the French Minister for War, General Lyautey, the two commanders discussed their personal difference—as to the manner in which Nivelle's orders to Haig should be phrased and communicated. Nivelle abandoned the right, which he apparently believed the Calais agreement to have given him, of addressing operation orders to Haig in the same form in which he might send them to commanders of French army groups.<sup>91</sup> In return, Haig definitely agreed to work under Nivelle during the coming offensive on condition that he was treated with the respect which, if Nivelle and his chief-of-staff had been wiser, would have been accorded to him from the first.<sup>92</sup> The personal difficulty—which impresses the layman as rather trivial, and which was probably in part the result of strained nerves—was thus settled. The British representative whom Nivelle required on his staff was forthwith sent.<sup>93</sup> As for Vimy, Haig insisted that he "could not modify his arrangements to please anyone"; and his objection<sup>94</sup> to advancing at Arras and leaving Vimy Ridge unattacked on his flank was so obviously sound that an explanation of it secured Lyautey's agreement. The date for the British attack was fixed—April 8th; the French offensive would be launched immediately after. Before returning to France, Nivelle

<sup>90</sup> *Lord Haig*, by Sir George Arthur, p. 119.

<sup>91</sup> By that agreement, as interpreted by Sir William Robertson, Haig had been bound "to obey Nivelle's order like a French commander," although both the Secretary of State for War and Robertson himself tried afterwards to soften for Haig this hard fact. The appropriate form for the orders was a matter for tact and discretion, and in this Nivelle blundered.

<sup>92</sup> Haig stipulated that "the British Army and its Commander-in-Chief will be regarded by General Nivelle as Allies, and not as subordinates," except during the coming offensive. Nivelle agreed. Even afterwards his attitude was not always wise—one of his later orders contained the phrase "I insist," but no trouble resulted.

<sup>93</sup> In the letter of February 27, to which Haig had objected, Nivelle had required him to appoint to this position Lieutenant-General Sir Henry Wilson, with certain other British officers as assistants. The giving of such instructions as to personnel was undoubtedly beyond the rights conferred upon Nivelle at the Calais conference. Haig now, however, agreed to Wilson's appointment.

<sup>94</sup> This objection had also been strongly raised by the army commanders concerned.

received confirmation of Haig's warning as to the retirement of the Germans: in front of the Northern Group of the French Armies, commanded by General Franchet d'Espérey, it was already beginning.

Thus ended the crisis in the command so far as it directly concerned the British. But, by a strange reversal of circumstances, the French commander, to whom Lloyd George had subjected the forces of Great Britain and of the dominions had now begun to lose the confidence of the French. It was not only Haig who had been warning Nivelle of the impending dislocation of the offensive. General Franchet d'Espérey, whose group of armies was to attack at Roye on the left of the main offensive, had been vainly urging similar views. On March 7th Nivelle gave way to the extent of laying down, against the event of withdrawal, a policy similar to Haig's: the Germans would be followed energetically, but by light forces, the divisions there set free being transferred for throwing against the enemy elsewhere, preferably east of Rheims. Franchet d'Espérey was authorised to advance the date of the Roye offensive first to March 19th,<sup>95</sup> and later, when Nivelle heard that the retirement had begun, to March 17th. But, when d'Espérey struck, he found the Germans already gone.

During the next fortnight, while the Allies followed the Germans across the destroyed zone, the world resounded with the fury aroused in the French nation by the devastation of this area. Not that the enemy had exceeded his rights under military law—a legal case could possibly be made out for every item of the demolition; but, with their usual inability to gauge the effect of their actions upon other peoples, and despite the entreaties of the group-commander (Crown Prince Rupprecht) himself, the German command had not only destroyed billets, roads, and avenues, but had sawed down fruit trees, even those trained against orchard walls. The Australians found farm implements broken up by small charges of explosive and the woodwork of houses destroyed. The desolation in Péronne had been surmounted with the insulting notice, painted on a large board: "Do not be annoyed—only wonder!"<sup>96</sup> These stupid military excesses,

<sup>95</sup> It was to be preceded by thirty-six hours' bombardment.

<sup>96</sup> "Nicht argern, nur wundern."

as to which German histories are mostly silent, resulted in no tactical advantage, but deeply embittered the French and even the British, further estranged neutrals, and strengthened the legend of Teutonic brutality which so greatly harmed the German cause both during and after the war.

Yet, while this outburst of indignation was filling the press and the popular mind, high French military circles were being disturbed by a different preoccupation—the swift growth of scepticism as to the feasibility of Nivelle's scheme. Grave doubts had indeed existed in the mind of Lyautey, the Minister of War, before his resignation and the fall of the Briand Ministry on March 17th; but that event and the withdrawal of the Germans quickly brought them to a head. The new Minister of War, Painlevé, himself opposed to Nivelle's methods, began to learn, as he himself says, "from twenty different sides"—through secret communications from staff officers, and finally through direct questions to and answers from Nivelle's three main subordinates, the commanders of the groups of armies which were to make the attack—that these leaders were now far from hopeful of success.<sup>97</sup> The Germans, it was said, were strengthening the front to be attacked.

All the generals, however, appeared to believe that the first and second lines of trenches could be taken, and that this partial success would be preferable to the results of countermanding the attack. The Minister of War therefore tried to induce all concerned to agree that the early stages of the attack should be carefully prepared, and that the attempt to go beyond them should be abandoned if the enemy's resistance, or bad weather, created overwhelming difficulties. He did not, however, succeed in establishing any real unanimity. Lack of confidence spread so rapidly that, on April 6th—only three days before Haig and two British armies<sup>98</sup> were to launch their part in the offensive required by Nivelle, and when the British bombardment had already been begun—Painlevé and Ribot, the new Premier, met Nivelle and the French group-commanders at Compiègne in a last desperate

<sup>97</sup> Before the German withdrawal General Micheler, whose group was to break through the enemy, had estimated the chances of success at 80 per cent.; now, he said, they were 20 per cent.

<sup>98</sup> First and Third. The British attack had been postponed for a day, and was to be delivered on April 9.

effort to secure agreement between them. Little was achieved—tempers were too strained; but on one point there was no doubt: the French part in the offensive could not be abandoned.<sup>69</sup> These consultations were naturally undermining Nivelle's authority, and he offered to resign. At such a time this step could not be contemplated; but the enthusiasm of some of the chief participants in the coming offensive had, to say the least, been damped.

Entirely unconscious of these unpropitious events developing in high circles, the British armies prepared for the operations at Arras, or, with the French on their flank, followed, from mid-March, the German forces now known to be withdrawing to the Hindenburg Line.

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<sup>69</sup> Those present were President Poincaré, Ribot (Premier), Painlevé (War Minister), and Generals Nivelle, Pétain, Franchet d'Espérey, Castlenau, and Micheler.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE ADVANCED GUARDS

BAPAUME had been occupied practically without a struggle, although, in the official *communiqué*, the suppression of a few snipers was reported as "stiff fighting," an exaggeration which originated in the reports of the 5th Australian Division.<sup>1</sup> The troops who seized the place were well aware that the published reports made too much of the fight. Nevertheless, the occupation of Bapaume aroused among them, as throughout the whole army, a glow of elation whose warmth it is difficult to recapture in a written account. During half of 1916, while the British Army had been waging the most terrible struggle in its history, this town had been the goal. In the first intention merely the point at which the "breaking-through" to be achieved in the first few days would be completed, it had, like Achi Baba in Gallipoli, gradually come to be looked upon as a goal in itself. Staffs of corps and even of armies had tended to become engrossed in efforts to gain the few acres of mud and débris which led up to it; and tens of thousands of the flower of the British nation devoted the last weeks of their lives to an all-absorbing endeavour "to reach Bapaume."

Consequently, when the news of its fall began to spread—even while the 30th Battalion on the morning of March 17th was still exchanging shots with the distant enemy in the green pastures beyond the town, and a persistent machine-gun in a small copse north of it was holding up the advance of the 6th Brigade—staff officers, war correspondents, and official photographers began to stream to the place. On March 18th the tide of visitors flowed so strongly as to arouse caustic comment from the working parties of Australian pioneers toiling to bridge or fill-in gaps blown by the Germans in the Albert-Bapaume road.

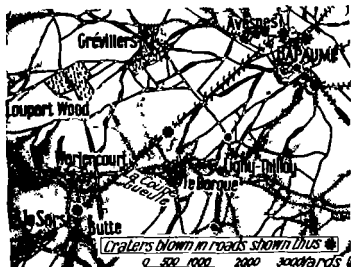
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<sup>1</sup> The division reported: "We entered Bapaume at 7.30 a.m. after a fight at the Old Factory. We now have a company in Bapaume and are close on heels of enemy, fighting all the way." No exaggeration was intended, but the desire of G.H.Q. to emphasise the notion of the German defeat caused the report to be included in the *communiqué*. Crown Prince Rupprecht in his diary remarks: "The enemy *communiqués* contain lies concerning our withdrawal."



By many of these sightseers the day will probably never be forgotten. All came by car along the only road possible, the old Roman highway from Amiens to Bapaume, past the railway siding and huts newly planted on the desert upland that had once been Pozières, down the long muddy slope to the tangled wreckage of Le Sars (now fast disappearing to fill in holes in the road), past the Butte of Warlencourt, and across the bottom of the valley where the Germans had blown a huge crater in the roadway.

Ever since the enemy's withdrawal on March 11th from Grévillers, the 2nd Pioneer Battalion, engineers, and working parties of infantry had been making a semicircular by-track on the rim of this crater—the hole being too deep for immediate filling-in—and also digging a détour in the nature of a dry ford across the Thames Ditch where the culvert at Le Coupe Gueule had been blown up. Other craters higher up the road were being similarly



dealt with, and light Decauville lines extended—one of them to meet the old German railway beside the Bapaume road. The road was already fit for light traffic, and the visitors sped up the eastern side of the valley, within sight of battered Le Barque and Thillois lightly veiled in half-shredded trees, until shell-holes became rarer, the slope greener, and the gables of Bapaume came in view on the summit to the right, nested behind dark pines and green ramparts, with the smoke of burning houses tumbling eastward in dense grey and white columns. Near the old German pioneer park, half-a-mile short of the northern outskirts, the tourists left their cars and walked across the grass to the town. Although the houses had been systematically destroyed, their sides in many instances blown out, and shavings and tar spilled about the rooms and on the furniture to encourage the conflagration, some refused to burn. The arcaded and balconied town hall and many buildings around the main square were practically intact, and for the first time the Australian troops and many of their visitors found themselves assisting in a scene of the type

made familiar by old battle-painters. This was war as a man had read of and pictured it in the days before enlistment—before his boyhood's notions had given way to an impression of warfare as a mere distortion of city life, at its zenith of discomfort in the trenches. The Germans were almost equally exhilarated by the change. According to an officer of their artillery, then withdrawing, the night of March 17th

reminded one of pictures of the war in Russia. Everywhere the last explosive charges were blowing up. All around the villages were burning. . . . For a few days the soldier on the Western Front participated in a miniature reproduction of the war of movement.<sup>2</sup>

On the British side the elation increased when troops and visitors passed into the green countryside beyond Bapaume. It is true that from all villages within sight and from many beyond the horizon long plumes of smoke were trailing; that the trees along at least one side of every road—and, where time had permitted, along both sides—had been felled, the village houses blown down, and mines exploded to form huge craters at important crossways. The old inhabitants might not have recognised the landscape. But its life was just stirring under the first breath of the wonderful European spring, and to troops coming straight from the Somme battlefield it had a freshness and beauty such as few had imbibed from any similar scene.

Motoring along between green banks and trees had a delightfully fresh feeling (noted an Australian visitor on March 19). We passed groups of our men in the remains of German dugouts by the roadside—every dugout blown down and the woodwork apparently taken away. . . . We skirted round a crater and passed Favreuil on the left and found ourselves blocked by a crater at the entrance of the tiny village of Beugnâtre. It was the first time I realised how complete the German demolition had been. He was blowing down every single house as he left the villages—the side walls were blown out of them and the roofs lay flat on the ground. Beugnâtre had been utterly destroyed. He is doing it in order to refuse us billets, and in order, perhaps, to make the French people tired of the war. It is a sight that makes you monstrously angry—this fat-headed, wrong-headed race with its fixed idea that the smallest military need justifies the greatest civil destruction. If I'm not wrong though, he's very mistaken in the French people.

The Australians entered this new phase of the war in bounding spirits. The misery of the winter was forgotten. They were now in that land of mystery which had been the

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<sup>2</sup> *History of the 1st Guard Res Field Art. Regt*, p. 151.

other side of the enemy's line. To peer at the evidences of German occupation, dugouts, billets, beer-gardens, observation posts, the old positions of batteries and dumps—was a pastime of fascinating interest. It is true that practically everything of military use had been cleared away. The lower commanders, on being asked to furnish for G.H.Q. any evidence that the Germans had been forced prematurely to abandon the area, could find nothing of importance. Here a heap of trench-mortar ammunition had been left, there some helmets, greatcoats, rifles, a cart belonging to a machine-gun unit. Brigadier-General Wisdom frankly replied:

The enemy has systematically removed everything of value, such as rails of light railways, etc., and the amount of stores abandoned in the advanced guard area is practically nil.

"They had cleared everything," wrote an Australian journalist, "as clean as a dog licks a plate." Nevertheless, it was of poignant interest to compare the condition of the roads with that of the routes behind the British front,<sup>3</sup> to inspect the bivouacs and "cubby-houses" in the grassy moat of the Citadel, furnished with glass windows, chairs, tables, and even curtains, from the town.<sup>4</sup> Near the Cambrai road one palatial dugout had been left intact—a complete warren with two or three entrances and several chambers "with pink, white, and silk curtains drooped and lining the walls, a plush settee, and a blue plush table-cloth—all cut out of curtains from some French house."<sup>5</sup>

The Germans, unlike the British, used the French cemeteries for the burial of their dead; in that north of Bapaume was a newly-sprung crop of their graves, and the invaders had also foolishly raised there a solid stone monument to the dead of a well-known German corps. Much bitterness was aroused among the French by the planting of these monuments in their graveyards, and soldiers as rough-hewn as the Australians, looking on the havoc wrought by the enemy in his

<sup>3</sup> The roads were of course infinitely better than those on the old battlefield, immediately in rear of the British. It was noted, however, that at a few points (*c.g.*, in Beugnâtre and near supply dépôts) they seemed to have given way, and it was afterwards ascertained that during the retreat much congestion had occurred near Quéant.

<sup>4</sup> The British, being in a friendly country, could not furnish their bivouacs from comparatively intact towns.

<sup>5</sup> Extract from an Australian's diary

retreat, were not likely to respect this monument, with its Prussian cross and the initial of the Kaiser, and it became rudely defaced.<sup>6</sup>

The period of open warfare that occurred after the fall of Bapaume resembled that which followed the Battle of the Marne in this respect—that it was limited by the existence of a strong defensive line at a distance of from seven to twenty-seven miles beyond the position held by the Allies on March 17th. After the R.III line was passed, few defences except those around villages would be met until that immensely strong position was reached. But there the resemblance ended. The enemy's withdrawal was deliberate, not the immediate result of a great defeat; and, although there was evidence that the Hindenburg Line was not quite complete,<sup>7</sup> it was already being occupied by the main body of Prince Rupprecht's army without haste or pressure, and there was no hope of rushing the enemy out of it. The task was merely to drive back, by methods of open warfare, the rearguards left by the enemy in the belt of country west of that line. The southern flank of the Third Army and most of the Fifth had only six to eight miles of open country in front of them. The Fourth Army and the French had considerably more. But this green landscape was in reality only a wide No-Man's Land, and Haig, believing that the retreat merely prefaced a violent counter-thrust, guided his policy by two objects—first, to permit no interruption of his impending Arras-Vimy offensive, but rather to concentrate all possible strength in it; second, to give the Germans no opening for a successful counter-stroke, and to have ample reserves in hand to meet one if

<sup>6</sup> The propaganda which spread tales of German brutality—true and untrue—was doubtless responsible for this. Although the cases are not similar, it should in fairness be stated that the Germans respected the memorials of their opponents, at any rate so far as Australian experience went. The numerous Australian monuments at Pozieres, when captured by the Germans in 1918, were in no way damaged, except by the marks of battle. (Several are now in the Australian War Memorial.) Moreover, Australians who died behind the German lines were buried among the German dead; their graves were found to have been marked by precisely similar crosses and to have been tended as carefully as those of the Germans.

<sup>7</sup> According to the British Official History (*Military Operations, Vol. I, p. 322*), there is no evidence that any entrenchments had been prepared by the Germans along the Aisne until their armies began to fall back. The British tactics in following the retreat were based on the assumption that there did exist a chance of forcing the enemy out of the Aisne positions.

attempted. For both these ends as many divisions as possible were to be withdrawn from the line, and the armies following the enemy, though directed to "maintain pressure" on him "and harass his rear-guards," were to do so "with the minimum number of troops required." They were to seize all local opportunities of causing the enemy loss, but Haig suggested that this should be achieved "especially by artillery fire." Attacks in force, which would "be met by rear-guards fully prepared," were not likely to be worth while and, if they became necessary, must be "well prepared and supported by artillery." The point chiefly emphasised was that the whole British line should go forward cautiously,

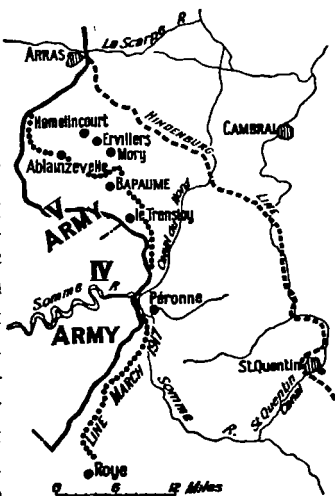


*The area of the withdrawal.*

securing our positions firmly as we advance and avoiding the committal of large forces in attacks before our communications are established or adequate preparations for assault have been made.

Subject to this cautious policy, the left of the Fifth Army would assist the Arras thrust. Its northern flank must therefore, as soon as possible, reach the Hindenburg Line, in order to strike that line from the south while the Third Army attacked from the west. In preparation for this stroke Gough was to advance his artillery to "the general line Beugny-Mory-Hamelincourt," within range of the sector to be attacked. If, however, it became clear that the artillery could better assist from some other army's front, 20 of the 35 siege batteries allotted to him would be moved elsewhere. It was left to Gough to keep G.H.Q. informed as to his plan for employing this artillery and particularly as to the date on which it would be ready to begin bombarding the Hindenburg Line. The Fourth Army had no such task. Its left would be hampered by lack of roads, its right by the crossing of the Somme. It was merely to cover the flanks of the Fifth and French Armies as they advanced.

These orders obviously entailed that particular care should be taken to perfect communications across the morass of the old Somme battlefield before the armies began to advance beyond it: the danger of counter-attack would be most serious if they hurried on after the enemy with this wilderness behind them preventing the supply of food, guns, and ammunition. The Fourth Army was also faced with the task of crossing the Somme River south of Péronne, and with the risk that the enemy might wait until part of the troops had crossed and then attack before the remainder could assist. Accordingly it was ordered that for the present the main body of the Fourth and Fifth Armies should advance no farther than the line Ablainzeville-Bapaume-Péronne-River Somme, where, not far beyond the edge of the old battlefield, they would fortify themselves under cover of their artillery while the roads were being remade across the slough behind them and round the craters everywhere blown by the Germans, and while railways were laid.



The British line on March 17 is dotted.

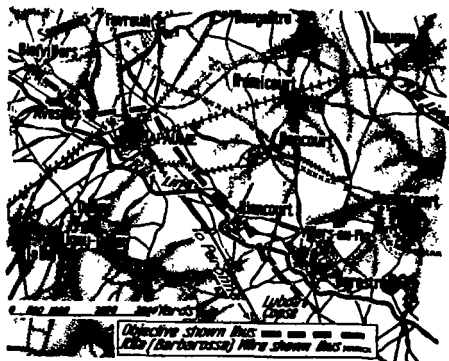
It will be seen that, while the advance of the Fourth Army was likely to be slow, the left of the Fifth Army must go forward as quickly as was compatible with Haig's injunctions as to caution. Gough accordingly decided to follow the enemy across the open country with small columns of horse, guns, and foot,<sup>8</sup> each division in the line furnishing one column which would act as its advanced guard, while the main body held the defensive position ordained by Haig. The Fourth Army commander, General Rawlinson, on the other hand, decided to maintain touch with the enemy by means of his cavalry alone; his infantry would be held back while the roads were repaired and the Somme cautiously crossed.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> He had already on March 15 warned his corps commanders of this decision (see p. 113).

<sup>9</sup> It is interesting, in view of General Monash's advance over the same country in 1918, to note that Rawlinson was instructed by Haig to "bear especially in mind the advantages of gaining possession of Mt. St. Quentin." This height, overlooking Péronne, was, however, abandoned by the Germans without resistance.

The Fifth Army, to assist it in keeping touch with the enemy on the Arras flank, was given the Lucknow Cavalry Brigade; the Fourth Army had to rely upon its "corps" mounted troops—a regiment of cavalry and two companies of cyclists in each army corps. The 5th Australian Division, which formed the right of the Fifth Army, was warned of this decision, so that it would be prepared for a weaker advance by the XIV Corps on its flank.

While these plans were filtering through to the front in a series of orders and instructions issued between March 16th and 18th, the British and the French farther south began to flood through the positions now abandoned to them by the withdrawal of the enemy on March 17th. At 10 o'clock that morning General Gough set the direction for his army's advance—north-east, "to cut off the Germans in front of the Third Army"—and fixed the boundaries for each of its three corps.<sup>10</sup> Headquarters of I Anzac had at 8.40 a.m. laid down the objective to be first reached by its troops—the villages lying immediately beyond the R.II line,<sup>11</sup> from which the troops would look out over the Bapaume plateau. From this line patrols were to be sent to other villages lying a mile or more beyond.<sup>12</sup> For patrolling, a squadron of the corps cavalry (13th Light Horse Regiment) was allotted to each division. The objective was early attained, and all day,



in the bright cold sunlight bathing the green country, the Australian brigades, each employing only a few extended companies in its front line,<sup>13</sup> endeavoured to reach the places to be attained by the patrols. But north of Bapaume the line

<sup>10</sup> From left to right—V corps, II Corps, I Anzac II Corps was withdrawn on March 20.

<sup>11</sup> From left to right—Brievillers, Avesnes-les-Bapaume, Bapaume, Riencourt

<sup>12</sup> Sapignies, Favreuil, Beugnâtre, Frémicourt, Haplincourt.

<sup>13</sup> Captain Scott of the 19th Battalion, for example, had only one company (Captain Sadler's) holding the front of the 5th Brigade.

of the 2nd Australian Division was held up by machine-guns chattering from the village of Sapignies and from two copses farther south, and its centre and left could not quite reach the Arras road. Across the country ahead straggled a russet line of wire-entanglement—that of the “Barbarossa” (R.II.a) Line—and the 8th Brigade (5th Division), which had attained its objective beyond Bapaume,<sup>14</sup> was faced by some force firing from behind this obstacle. South of Bapaume Brigadier-General Elliott’s 15th Brigade met fire of small arms from two neighbouring villages, Bancourt and Riencourt, and “tired” shells, whose wail could be long heard approaching, fell about the Péronne road, which was reached about 8 o’clock. The opposition evidently came from small parties, and far ahead, in the meadows beyond Bancourt, could be seen a patrol of German cavalry. “Uhlans!”, exclaimed the elated Victorians.<sup>15</sup> Aeroplanes were constantly in the sky, the British machines having evidently been sent out to ascertain the extent of the German retreat. But the Germans had on this day concentrated a sufficient air-force to oppose them, and the infantry saw no less than four British machines sent to ground in the area of the I Anzac Corps. This sight was repeated on March 25th, the infantry looking on with keen sympathy, since it was understood that the British air force was holding back its new machines for the coming offensive. and was deliberately fighting the Germans with other models,<sup>16</sup> “easy meat” for the little red scouts of Richthofen’s squadron.

At noon on the 17th Generals Hobbs of the 5th and Smyth of the 2nd Australian Divisions were warned that the method  
**The Advanced** of advance would probably be to throw  
**Guards** forward a small column from each division,

<sup>14</sup> It was the rule to take up a line beyond towns and villages, since they served as easy marks for artillery.

<sup>15</sup> Actually it was a detachment of the 6th Cuirassier Regt.

<sup>16</sup> This, at least, was the statement made to some A.I.F. officers by Lieutenant C. W. Short of the 3rd Squadron, R.F.C., who warmly defended the supposed policy of the British air staff. Floyd Gibbons, in *The Red Knight of Germany*, says that the absence of more efficient machines was due to the new models not being ready. The British Official History (*The War in the Air, Vol. III*) indicates that the new models were coming forward, but their pilots had not yet acquired the experience necessary to put the new aeroplanes to their best use. Lieutenant Short’s statement undoubtedly represented the general belief in the R.F.C. A few days later, when over the lines in one of the old machines, this very gallant officer was killed.



and the two columns were accordingly organised during that afternoon and evening. Each was commanded by a brigadier and comprised the whole, or part of, his brigade. The leaders chosen were two specially marked in their respective divisions for driving force—Gellibrand of the 6th Brigade and Elliott of the 15th. Their columns were similarly composed, except that, whereas General Smyth (2nd Division), having his 7th Brigade in reserve, was able to allot to Gellibrand the whole of 6th Brigade, General Hobbs (5th Division), with all three brigades in line, could at first give Elliott only two battalions of the 15th Brigade and half its engineer and machine-gun companies.<sup>17</sup> Each column was given some light horse and a battery of field artillery. Their composition was thus as follows:

<i>Left (2nd Division)</i>	<i>Right (5th Division)</i>
<i>Brigadier-General J. Gellibrand.</i>	<i>Brigadier-General H. E. Elliott.</i>
6th Aust. Inf. Brigade	Half of 15th Inf. Bde. (59th and 60th Bns.)
Troop of 13th Light Horse	Squadron of 13th Light Horse
12th Battery, A.F.A.	54th Battery, A.F.A.
Half of 6th Field Company	Half of 14th Field Company
6th Machine Gun Company	Half of 15th Machine Gun Company
One bearer subdivision, 5th Field Ambulance	One third (one tent subdivision, one bearer subdivision) of 15th Field Ambulance
	Half brigade section of Divnl Ammunition Column

Gough had strongly impressed on his corps commanders that the corps cavalry and cyclists must be used for their "legitimate functions," and that troops must reconcile themselves to advancing with their flanks in the air. Birdwood's order accordingly laid down that each column must be responsible for guarding its own flanks, but must be in signal communication with the columns right and left of it. They were to "act promptly and boldly against detached bodies of the enemy."

It was obvious that, in spite of their name, the columns would be carrying out a task different from that ordinarily undertaken by advanced guards, inasmuch as the main body would not be advancing close behind them. On the contrary,

<sup>17</sup> The remainder of the 15th Brigade, under Lieutenant-Colonel Stewart of the 57th Battalion, was withdrawn from the line and, under the name of "Stewart's Force," acted as reserve for the 5th Division.

it would be stationary and the columns, as they drew away from it and approached the formidable forces in the Hindenburg Line, would incur the risk of suffering strong blows without having assistance at hand. It is true that their artillery was to be increased as the enemy's resistance grew stronger, but if they rushed too far ahead there was danger, and little to be gained from it, since they were only operating against the enemy's rear-guard. Writing, therefore, on March 18th, General White, who throughout this phase was the constant adviser of the divisional commanders, pointed out to them the danger, and suggested that it should be overcome by setting their advanced guard commanders to attain each day a definite line, not too far advanced to be easily reached with ammunition and food, and with supporting troops if required.<sup>18</sup>

In spite of these limitations, the operations of the three weeks which followed were those of open warfare, and are of especial interest because, with the exception of certain fleeting phases in Gallipoli and in the final advance in 1918, they were the only operations of that nature experienced by the infantry of the A.I.F. Each of the brigadiers chosen was elated with the opportunity of exercising this interesting semi-independent command. Each was an experienced soldier: Gellibrand, formerly a British regular, trained at the Staff College, and with a record of service in South Africa, had recently attracted attention by his energy in pressing on the retiring Germans. Elliott, a Victorian solicitor and a keen military student, had also served in South Africa, where, though a junior, he received on one occasion special commendation from Lord Kitchener.<sup>19</sup> Both he and Gellibrand possessed an exceptionally strong hold upon their subordinates—Gellibrand more particularly on his officers, Elliott on his men. Both were men of marked character and courage, but each required holding. While Gellibrand could be trusted to play hard and in the full spirit of "the game," his decisions were apt to be on unexpected lines. As for Elliott, both Birdwood and White knew that the opportunity of at last employing his force according to the teachings of military

<sup>18</sup> He also warned the 2nd Division that the 5th would probably have to hold back its right owing to the slower pace of the Fourth Army's advance.

<sup>19</sup> Kitchener telegraphed: "Please tell Lieut. Elliott that I am very pleased with his conduct and that of his men in driving off Conroy and saving horses."

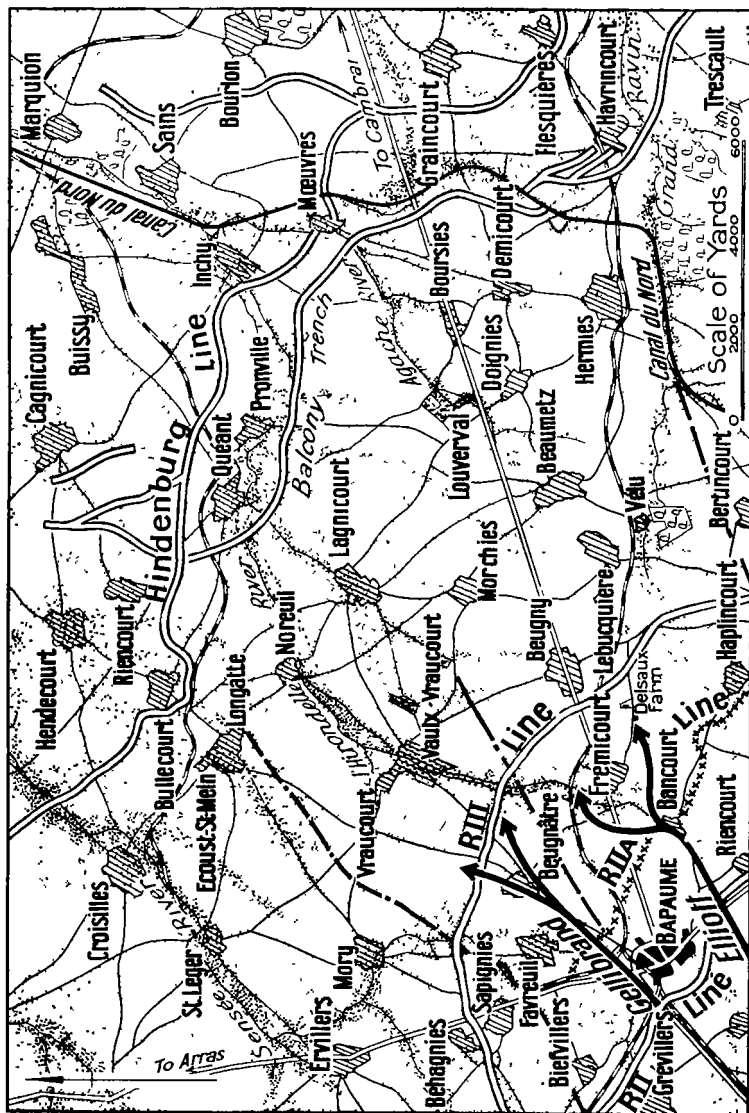
history would raise him to the seventh heaven of delight, but there lurked a fear that he might be so intent upon delivering his own tactical strokes that the objects of higher commanders, or the requirements of the forces on his flanks, might be disregarded.

The country in which the columns were to operate sloped gently down towards the enemy. By March 17th the whole of Gough's line had climbed on to the watershed on whose summit Bapaume lay, and all the divisions of the Fifth Army now looked out over open farm-lands dipping north-eastwards to several head-streams of the River Scheldt—from west to east, the small Rivers Cojeul, Sensée, Hirondelle, and Agache. To these streams numerous smaller sources trickled their waters, wearing gentle valleys nearly all leading north-east. There were few woods or scattered farmhouses, the farmers in this part of France living almost entirely in the villages. Except the orchards and back gardens of these hamlets, the fields were not hedged or fenced, and the only feature on the open country was an occasional copse of low scrub<sup>20</sup> and here and there a red-brick sugar factory or distillery. For the I Anzac Corps the most important roads were one leading from Bapaume north-eastward through Beugnâtre to Vaulx-Vraucourt and other villages, and the Roman road which ran like a ruled line from Bapaume eastward through Frémicourt, Beugny, and Boursies to Cambrai. Along the former Gellibrand's column would advance, along the latter Elliott's. In front of Gellibrand, after Beugnâtre was passed, nearly all the villages lay hidden in valleys; in front of Elliott nearly all stood out upon higher ground. Along the right flank of Elliott's advance would lie a valley—that of the Grand Ravin—running due east past Hermies (eight miles from Bapaume) and thence on to join the Scheldt a few miles southward of Cambrai. Cambrai itself—the original objective for the Arras offensive—lay hidden in the Scheldt valley, fifteen miles east of the I Anzac sector; but Bournonville hill, a few miles short of it, covered with woods like the wool on a negro's pate, could be seen from any high point on the Anzac front.

Into this country the advanced guards started at once. Elliott's assembled on the night of the 17th at "Factory

<sup>20</sup> The large trees had mostly been felled by the Germans, much of the timber had probably been used on the Somme.

Map No. 1



THE AREA FROM BAPAUME TO THE HINDENBURG LINE.

This shows the boundaries and sphere of operations of the two advanced guards of the I Anzac Corps when following the German withdrawal in March 1917

Corner," north of Flers,<sup>21</sup> and late in the night commenced to cross the old winter front lines by the road past Luisenhof Farm to Ligny-Thilloy. On reaching the Bapaume-Péronne road at the crest of the ridge, south of Bapaume, the 59th Battalion, under Colonel Layh, forming the vanguard, extended into line,<sup>22</sup> gradually opening out with its scouts in front and Major McIntyre's squadron of the 13th Light Horse farther ahead as a screen. About day-break on March 18th it passed through the outposts near Bancourt and moved forward with its left company north of the Cambrai road. The transport and guns had been unable to keep pace with the column, and during the morning Major Wieck, Elliott's brigade-major, found them hopelessly bogged near Luisenhof Farm. An effort to drag them through by doubling the teams merely sank the waggons deeper, and Wieck therefore now sent them back through Bazentin and Martinpuich to come forward again along the Bapaume road. To supply Elliott's immediate need for artillery, General Hobbs sent him, instead of the bogged guns, a battery which happened to be close to Bapaume.<sup>23</sup> The battery originally allotted, the 54th, was then ordered to move, when it could, with the rest of the 5th Divisional Artillery—13th, 14th, and (attached) 2nd Brigades—by the road from Gueudecourt to Beaulencourt; it eventually joined Elliott on the 21st, on which day the last field-guns of the division were still being hauled through the morass.<sup>24</sup> Elliott's headquarters on the night of March 18th went without its rations, and no battery was available for him that day; otherwise his advance was not impeded by this miscarriage.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>21</sup> The leading battalion of the column, the 59th, had been bivouacking in Flers when its commander informed his company commanders, to their great surprise, that he expected them to be seven miles in advance by the following evening.

<sup>22</sup> Captain K. G. McDonald, who had to straighten the line, states that it consisted of half-platoons in column at 100 yards' intervals. The left company gave the direction.

<sup>23</sup> The 4th Battery, part of the 2nd Field Artillery Brigade, which had already taken up positions between Thilloy and the Bapaume road.

<sup>24</sup> The 55th Battery joined Elliott on March 20, and the 54th next day. The 3rd Field Artillery Brigade crossed the old battlefield early by carefully picking a route across country between the shell-holes.

<sup>25</sup> Elliott's column, like the rest of the 5th Division, had to avoid the use of the Albert-Bapaume road except in extreme emergency. The Luisenhof Farm road, which, through faulty reconnaissance, was first tried, proved impossible, and the Flers-Gueudecourt-Beaulencourt road was eventually used. It was presently discovered that the old foundations of the road remained even in the worst places, but had been covered deeply with mud. When once this mud was removed and the shell-holes had been temporarily bridged or filled in with bricks from the shattered villages, the road would carry both guns and horse-transport.

The railhead for the supplies of the 5th Division was still at the "Quarry" near Longueval. From there motor lorries carried the rations to an advanced

The plateau and its many villages were now in view, and, almost immediately after the advance began, the light horse, whose small patrols were cantering about the country with the intention of attracting fire and so locating the enemy, were shot at. apparently by some twenty rifles, from Frémicourt, the first village along the Bapaume–Cambrai road. Elliott, who had with him certain of the officers and men of his own and other Victorian militia units, had trained his troops carefully for this class of warfare, impressing on them the advisability of enveloping the enemy's flanks. Before the advance he had explained to Colonel Layh and Major McIntyre (both officers of the old militia) his intention that patrols should feel for the gaps between the enemy's detachments and, by penetrating, either cut them off or force them to retire. The light horse patrols, however, when they attempted to close around Frémicourt, were met by the fire of rifles and a machine-gun firing from a railway station out in the fields between that town and Beugny (the second village along the Cambrai road).

The line of the infantry was meanwhile approaching; but on this first day of open warfare all troops felt uncomfortable when crossing country in face of even a handful of the enemy. The line tended to advance jerkily, with long intervals under cover, and also to swing round towards any point from which fire came. Thus, all three front-line companies of the 59th drew in towards the village. Meanwhile, however, the intelligence officer of the brigade, Lieutenant Salmon,<sup>20</sup> who was acting as Elliott's *liaison* officer with the light horse scouts,

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dump at Bernafay Wood. A brigade pack-train was organised from the officers' horses and from the pack-horse establishment of each brigade, and during the early days of the German withdrawal both supplies and ammunition for the field-guns were sent on pack animals across the old battlefield as well as to the troops who were following the enemy. One day's reserve of supplies for the advanced guard was immediately dumped at Bapaume, and a second day's reserve at Frémicourt, where an advanced dump of shells for Elliott's artillery was also formed. Thus, although for daily rations from the Quarry to the troops six handlings were necessary, and the distribution by the pack-train in the country east of Bapaume was sometimes irregular, the troops going short once or twice, two days' supply was from the first available in case of emergency over and above the daily ration from the rear.

By March 21 the Gueudecourt—Beaulencourt road was fit for horse-waggons, and by the 28th the divisional Decauville railway from Ginchy (worked mainly by two companies of the 5th Pioneer Battalion) had been pushed through to Beaulencourt. The brigade ammunition dumps were at once transported by this means to the other side of the old battlefield. Thus and other measures eased the strain upon the pack-train, whose animals had been showing the effects of constant work, night and day.

<sup>20</sup> Captain R. A. Salmon, M.C.; 57th Bn. Bank clerk, of Ballarat, Vic., b Ballarat East, 30 Jan., 1892. (Major R. G. Legge, Elliott's staff-captain, was also with the light horse patrols.)

left them to join the first infantry patrol that came along, and with it entered and searched Frémicourt, finding no trace of the enemy. Near the farther end of the town, however, a machine-gun was heard very close. Salmon's party raced at full speed towards the sound, but, although keenly searched for, the Germans escaped without being seen. A larger party of the 59th, under Lieutenant Robb,<sup>27</sup> then came up, and, the two groups joining forces, charged<sup>28</sup> towards the railway building in the fields before Beugny from which fire was now coming. The fire ceased, but on reaching the crest of a rise the Australians found their way barred by the wire of the R.III line, behind which stood a number of Germans. These jumped into the trench and opened fire. The advance was thus stopped at the crest, and Salmon went off to report the position to his general.<sup>29</sup> Meanwhile, at 7.30, patrols of the light horse working round Frémicourt wounded a German and captured two who were making a belated attempt to escape.<sup>30</sup> The main line of the infantry, moving on both sides of the village, soon came up.

The drawing in of the 59th towards Frémicourt necessitated some reorganisation, after which the advance continued. The **Delsaux Farm** left was still held up in front of Beugny by rifles and a single machine-gun, and the right centre by similar fire from near the bleak buildings of Delsaux Farm, a large solitary homestead half-a-mile south of that place. In both cases the fire obviously came from the strongly wired R.III line.<sup>31</sup> The wire made encirclement by mounted troops impossible, and the advance was stopped. Colonel Layh therefore brought up his reserve company on his right, and at 3.45, having been reinforced by a company from the main guard (60th Battalion), deployed and commenced to envelop Delsaux Farm.

<sup>27</sup> Lieut. J. F. Robb, 59th Bn. Clerk; of Toorak, Vic.; b. Toorak, 2 April, 1892. Killed in action, 23 March, 1917.

<sup>28</sup> "We started off (says Salmon) in successive waves, but got tired of that formation, and all ran on together in a jolly fashion of our own. . . . Everyone was in great form. The change from the Somme mud to the green sward had put new life into us, and the advance was carried out in a picnic spirit."

<sup>29</sup> Throughout this day the 15th Brigade signallers under Lieut. N. O'Brien (of Brisbane) kept the advancing companies in communication with Colonel Layh. This was only achieved by salving and using miles of German telephone wire. The brigade orders, however, were based mainly on the accurate information brought in, throughout these operations, by Lieut. Salmon.

<sup>30</sup> The village, having been a headquarters, was at once thoroughly searched for papers, but nothing of value was found.

<sup>31</sup> Delsaux Farm stood between the two trenches of the R.III system. A photograph of the farm and the country in front of it is given in *Vol. XII (plate 299)*.

From the prisoners taken near Frémicourt<sup>32</sup> it was known that these Germans formed part of a line of isolated machine-gun posts whose nearest supports were said to be three and a half miles in rear, at Doignies. Pinning the Germans down by fire at close range from the front, the infantry crept forward on the flanks. Some distant fire was received from the right,<sup>33</sup> but the line continued to advance, except near the farm itself. Here the enemy had a machine-gun firing from a large crater in a road which crossed the R.III line. The field of fire for this gun was perfect, but the troops opposite it, advancing by sectional rushes, reached the shelter of a bank, and two Vickers machine-guns of the 15th Company were also brought up to suppress it. About 5 p.m. the flanks of the Australian attack began to creep round, and the German officer in charge accordingly ordered his men to withdraw.<sup>34</sup> He gallantly remained to the last, and was starting to follow across the open, swinging a walking-stick, when he was shot dead. The attacking Victorians, although their casualties during the whole day amounted only to eight, were almost worn out by the weight of their packs, which they carried throughout, and the Germans escaped with the loss of four killed. But in this officer's dugout was found an operation order—marked "not to be taken into the front line"—disclosing the disposition and intention of the enemy's rear-guard in this and the neighbouring sectors.

This order amplified the intelligence already received from the Frémicourt prisoners. It showed that the Australians were now confronted by troops different from those that had faced them since early November. The two Guard divisions of the Guard Reserve Corps had vanished, apparently withdrawn into reserve.<sup>35</sup> Instead, Elliott's column was confronted by a battalion of the 38th Division,<sup>36</sup> with a battalion of the 2nd Guard Reserve Division to the north facing Gelli-brand's column, and one of the 4th Ersatz Division to the south, facing the XIV British Corps cavalry.<sup>37</sup> The XIV German Reserve Corps,

<sup>32</sup> They were examined immediately by an officer of Elliott's staff

<sup>33</sup> From a party of Germans in a road near Lebucquière.

<sup>34</sup> Sergeant S. G. Facey (of Mansfield, Vic.) of the 59th by his sniping precipitated this retreat. (Subsequently gaining a commission, Facey was killed in action on 4 July, 1918.)

<sup>35</sup> They reappeared in April at Acheville, east of Vimy; later at Lens, and, in September and October, in the Third Battle of Ypres.

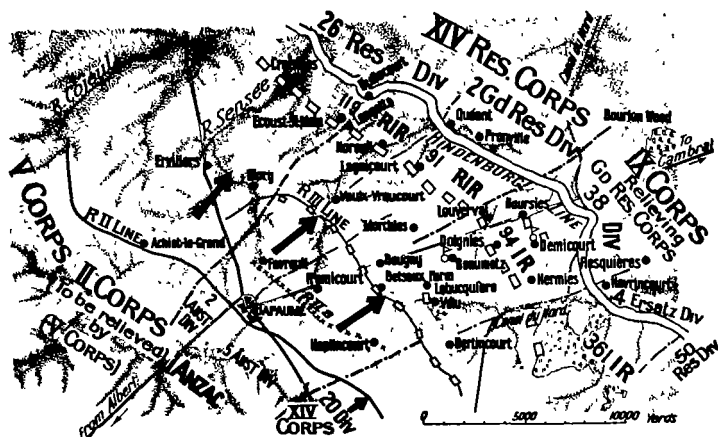
<sup>36</sup> This division had fought in Poland and Russia, at Verdun, and on the Somme at Serre. It had recently been withdrawn to work on the R.I and Hindenburg Lines, which it now occupied, the Guard Reserve Corps marching through it.

<sup>37</sup> It is now known that the staff of the Guard Reserve Corps was still in charge, having as its divisions, from north to south, the 38th, 4th Ersatz, and 50th Reserve. The 2nd Guard Reserve Division belonged to the German XIV Reserve Corps, farther north



to which the 2nd Guard Reserve Division belonged, was still, as during the Somme battle, responsible for the "A" Group<sup>38</sup> of the First German Army; the Guard Reserve Corps staff still had charge of "B" area (38th and 4th Ersatz Divisions) until March 23, when it was relieved by the staff of the IX Corps. As the front of the I Anzac Corps expanded during the advance, its left, moving north-eastwards, became engaged with the divisions of "A" Group, which fell back more to the east, towards Quéant. The right of I Anzac then still confronted part—though only the northern part—of "B."

These divisions now occupied the Hindenburg defences, but in front of that line they had posted a screen consisting of one battalion per division, together with certain supports. Part of the duty of this screen had been to cover the last stage of the retirement, but it was still, by simulating the appearance of strength, to delay the British and



impede attempts to reconnoitre the Hindenburg Line. It was not to offer "lasting resistance," but to repel "fairly strong reconnaissances." It was disposed in a line of outposts occupying a string of villages a few miles in front of the Hindenburg Line, and was supported by small reserves and by artillery, split up for purposes of deception into single-gun batteries. But in advance of it had been stationed a forward screen, weak in numbers but of specially picked troops, holding a series of posts along R.II and patrolling the ground in front of it. When, at 11 p.m. on March 17, the last rear-guards of the R.II garrison had withdrawn from the Barbarossa wire<sup>39</sup> and, at 3 a.m. on the 18th, its main guards had left R.III, it was these two screens that took over the fight. So far, Elliott had been in contact only with the light advanced screen of the 38th Division, consisting of 230 *sturm* and other picked troops, with three machine-guns and a troop of cavalry,

<sup>38</sup> See Vol III, p 915 "A Group" now became known also as the "Quéant Group," and "B" as the "Cambrai Group."

<sup>39</sup> See p 130

disposed in four posts<sup>40</sup> on a front of two and a quarter miles, and in small reserves. Its headquarters were in Beaumetz, and its orders were "to hold R.III against fairly strong reconnaissance patrols," to "harass and trick" the British patrols wherever they felt forward, and to capture prisoners. "Every step forward must cost the Englishman heavy losses." The main screen lay farther back, east of Beaumetz, and consisted, in the 38th Division's sector, of the III Battalion of the 94th Infantry Regiment, supported by two companies of the 95th. Its line lay round the villages of Louverval, Doignies, and Hermies, with reserves in Demicourt and Boursies. These rear-guards had general orders to blow up their remaining billets before leaving, and the Cuirassiers were instructed to "see that sufficient dung lies ready beside the wells," presumably for purposes of pollution.<sup>41</sup>

Despite the Australian efforts, the Guard Reserve Corps Headquarters, which was still in charge of the troops in this sector, records: "The enemy followed slowly."

As Beugny had not yet been taken, the 59th Battalion bivouacked for the night behind the R.III wire, the picquets being stationed generally opposite the gaps, with sentry groups out on the far side. The dispositions were orderly, and lucid reports and sketches, sent in by well-trained company commanders, gave Layh a clear grasp of the situation. His left was in loose touch with Gellibrand's column, whose advance, having been even less seriously opposed, had been deeper. Only on the right was there ground for anxiety. The Australian infantry on March 17th and 18th advanced far ahead of the infantry on either flank,<sup>42</sup> and, although on the north this was quickly rectified, on the south the British infantry was being held back by a definite order not to patrol more than 1,500 yards beyond Rocquigny. Whereas the I Anzac Corps had behind it much the best road in the whole region—the Albert-Bapaume highway—and had been able to push on with road and railway repairs during the preliminary German retirements, the XIV Corps possessed none of these advantages.<sup>43</sup> Its difficulties may be judged by the fact that one gun of the battery sent to support its cavalry patrols

<sup>40</sup> Each was about 40 strong. One was at Beugny, another at Delsaux Farm. The cavalry were of the 6th Cuirassier Regiment.

<sup>41</sup> Ludendorff says: "Poisoning of wells was forbidden." The pollution of wells by horse-dung was possibly not considered to amount to poisoning, for some wells were undoubtedly treated in this manner. The medical authorities of the British Fourth Army certified that those at Barleux contained arsenic, but, on further tests being made, this was found to be a mistake.

<sup>42</sup> The gap on the right was discovered by Elliott's brigade-major, Wieck, who, after riding across to find the British near Rocquigny, passed through Barastre and Haplincourt and found both these villages unoccupied by the troops of either side.

<sup>43</sup> The corps staff had actually foreshadowed that it could not advance beyond its defensive line before April 1.

"disappeared into a shell-hole full of water on the Sailly Saillisel-Le Transloy road." As the corps cavalry patrols were very weak, Elliott protected his flank by occupying Haplincourt to his right rear. The main guard (60th Battalion) was brought up to Frémicourt.

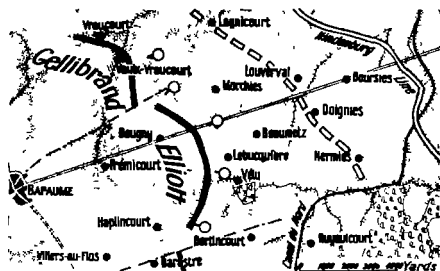
General Hobbs's orders for the following day left Elliott free to exercise almost unfettered discretion until he reached about the line of Lagnicourt and Doignies—six miles north-east of his original starting-point. At that stage he was to report and await further orders. Late in the night there reached the front an order sent out by General Gough with the object of hastening the approach of his left flank to the Hindenburg Line. This injunction, to support the cavalry "and drive in all enemy detachments to the Hindenburg Line," concerned Gellibrand's column more closely than Elliott's,<sup>44</sup> but Elliott was informed by his divisional commander that an additional battalion would be held ready to support him. He was warned to protect his right flank, where only British cavalry was operating, but was left free to adopt his own tactics with one restriction—that he must act within the boundaries allotted to his division.

In order that the mistake of the previous day—swerving in towards opposition—should not be repeated, Elliott this day ordered that each company should be allotted a particular frontage and should not change the direction of its advance without special orders. The light horse at day-break moved out towards Morchies, Beaumetz, and Bertincourt—a village lying on slightly higher ground in the territory allotted to the XIV Corps on Elliott's right. They passed Beugny, although it was still held by the enemy, but were soon fired on from left, centre, and right, the fire on the right coming from the villages of Lebucquière and Vêlu. At 10.30 the 60th Battalion, strengthened by a company-and-a-half of the 59th, after marching up from Frémicourt, moved through the outposts of the 59th and took up the duties of the vanguard, the rest of the 59th remaining in the R.III line as main guard. The left flank, under Captain Doyle, advancing north of the Cambrai road with scouts 500 yards in front and then two

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<sup>44</sup> See p. 177.

platoons followed by a company—all in artillery formation—was fired on from Beugny.<sup>45</sup> The scouts returned the fire but moved on round the village in time to see the Germans withdrawing along the road to Morchies. A platoon under Lieutenant Walker,<sup>46</sup> pushing quickly on, was hampering their retirement with its fire when a body of German cavalry appeared on its left. The cavalry, though easily checked by rifle-fire, eventually took up a position near Maricourt Wood, on the line of junction of Elliott's and Gellibrand's columns. Field-gun shells also came from that direction. Elliott's column continued for a while to advance slowly. The centre and right, under Captain Kerr,<sup>47</sup> next came under fire from a strong machine-gun post on the Cambrai road, and from another near his right boundary. By noon the 60th was held up in a curved line facing these enemy detachments. Lebucquière, Vélu, and Vélu Wood to the south were a formidable obstacle, and the light force could not outflank them on the south in consequence of fire from Germans on the corps boundary. Elliott accordingly sent another company of the 59th to strengthen his right, and half-a-company to protect his flank, and, if possible, to occupy Bertincourt in spite of the fact that this was beyond his boundary. Meanwhile the 4th Battery had arrived and shelled the Germans both in Vélu and near Bertincourt. The latter withdrew to Bertincourt, from which they kept up an ineffective fire, and the advance continued. Patrols entered Lebucquière and Vélu on the heels of the enemy, who had set fire to these places and withdrawn. The vanguard threw



*German posts (white dots) and rear-guard (broken line).*

#### **Lebucquière and Vélu**

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<sup>45</sup> "Diamond formation" was largely used in these operations, especially upon the approach of hostile aeroplanes. The companies would advance with their platoons disposed diamond-wise, and the platoons with their sections disposed in the same way. On the approach of an enemy aeroplane the men in each section would extend into diamond formation.

<sup>46</sup> Lieut. E. L. Walker, 60th Bn. Commercial traveller; of Essendon, Vic; b Ascot Vale, Vic. 29 Oct., 1891.

<sup>47</sup> Major T. Kerr, M.C.; 60th Bn. Farmer and grazier; of Maffra and Sale, Vic., b Denison, Vic. 5 Oct. 1888.

posts around both villages and Vélú Wood; but Bertincourt was still held by the enemy, whose flares rose from it during the night. The troops on both flanks being then far in rear,<sup>48</sup> Elliott's advance ceased for the night,<sup>49</sup> the light horse being sent back to Frémicourt.

The advanced line of I Anzac was now far beyond that of the Fourth Army, but still only four miles beyond Bapaume

**Morchies and  
Beaumetz**

About midnight General Gough sent out a second call for more energy on his left. As this did not concern the right, corps headquarters proposed that the 5th Division should merely advance to Morchies. General Hobbs, however, had already agreed to a suggestion of Elliott that on the 20th he should take Beaumetz also. Elliott formulated the plan, proposing to employ both his battalions, 59th and 60th. The project would necessitate the swinging up of his right, and as Bertincourt, half-a-mile south of that flank, was still in German hands he decided that he must seize this village even though it was beyond his boundary. Though Hobbs, on being informed, thought the action unnecessary, he concurred, and notified the 20th British Division, in whose front it lay. To form Elliott's reserve, the 29th (Victoria) Battalion of the 8th Brigade (General Tivey) was sent up to Frémicourt.

Though the main German rear-guard line was some distance beyond Beaumetz, the village had been the headquarters of the light screen, and fairly stubborn resistance by light forces might therefore be expected. At 8 a.m. the light horse were strongly fired on both from there and from Morchies; but Bertincourt was found empty, and was occupied by the light horse.<sup>50</sup> The infantry could now advance, and moved out at 11 o'clock. The previous night had been a vile one—wet, dark, and bitter—and the day was cold, with occasional snowstorms. The men of both battalions were now almost exhausted with their long continued effort.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, advancing on a wide front, the 59th about midday occupied

<sup>48</sup> Gellibrand's centre was well advanced, but his right in R.III did not advance until dusk.

<sup>49</sup> On the left the 60th's line was held by platoon-posts with sentry groups 100 yards in front.

<sup>50</sup> They were relieved at 9.30 a.m. by cavalry of the XIV Corps.

<sup>51</sup> This appears to have been the case also with the light horse detachments, which at first were somewhat overworked by the commanders of both the columns.

Morchies, from which the Germans, after some firing, withdrew.<sup>52</sup> Parties of the enemy could, however, be seen running to their positions in front of Beaumetz and digging posts in the open beyond both its flanks. About 2 p.m. the centre of the 60th was stopped in front of the village by heavy fire, but the widely spread flanks continued to work slowly round it. At 3.30 the 4th Battery fired on the place, and Germans began to run from it. By 4.30 the 60th were already closing around it when German reinforcements were seen moving along the railway line from Hermies, two miles to the right front, towards the south of Beaumetz. As they would descend upon the rear of the 60th's right company, the attacking Victorians were recalled, and a line short of the village was occupied for the night. The 60th was utterly worn out, and was immediately relieved by the 29th, but the skilful attack had achieved its object. When before dawn on March 21st a small party was sent to Beaumetz the village was found empty and, despite some initial trouble from a machine-gun on the flank, was quickly occupied by the 29th.

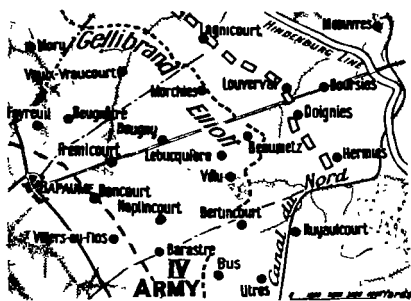
Elliott's line now lay close in front of Morchies and Beaumetz, with the main German rear-guard position, which he had not yet attacked,<sup>53</sup> 600 yards beyond. His right was nearly two miles ahead of the Fourth Army's left, and his skilful and vigorous advance brought congratulations from Generals Gough, Hobbs, and Birdwood, although the latter sharply reprimanded him for his breach of orders in occupying Bertincourt.<sup>54</sup> Gough was more intent upon thrusting with

<sup>52</sup> During the previous night a young officer of the 60th, Lieut. M. D. Knight (of St. Kilda, Vic.), while visiting his posts, had lost his way and entered a village which he thought to be Beugny. He presently recognised that it was held by the enemy and discovered that he was in Morchies. After much difficulty he made his way back between the German sentries. (He was killed in action on 6 July, 1918.)

<sup>53</sup> Gellibrand's had attacked it early on the 20th (see pp 178-86).

<sup>54</sup> On the night of March 20 Elliott learned that the British cavalry, which had relieved his troops in Bertincourt, had left that village. He therefore again ordered a platoon of his own infantry to occupy it. Corps headquarters was informed, and Elliott was ordered to hand the place over to British cavalry, but on the arrival next day of a small British patrol he refused to do so, insisting that the garrison must be strong enough to beat off German patrols. This view seems to have been adopted, for on March 21, after request by Birdwood, the XIV Corps ordered the 20th Division to occupy the village as an infantry outpost. The order was not carried out until the 23rd, and Elliott kept a guard there until that day. If Beaumetz was to be taken, the occupation of Bertincourt seems a reasonable precaution; there was, however, every reason why it should not be attempted without notice being first given to I Anzac and XIV Corps Headquarters. The 20th British Division was notified by Hobbs, but it was then discovered that this division had no control over the British cavalry who were patrolling in the Bertincourt area. These received their orders direct from XIV Corps Headquarters, which might have ordered them to attack Bertincourt without knowledge that the Australians were holding it.

his left than with his right, but Elliott's last advance had brought his column into position to assist the next move by the left column—an attack on part of the enemy's main rear-guard line at Lagnicourt. Pending that stroke, General Hobbs, in accordance with the policy of prudence imposed by Haig on the whole line, forbade Elliott to advance from his present position without further orders—another restriction against which Elliott chafed. March 21st and 22nd were spent in quietly consolidating and preparing to help the attack on Lagnicourt. A second battalion of the 8th Brigade, the 30th (New South Wales), was allotted to Elliott to relieve the 59th in the Morchies sector, north of the Cambrai road, the 29th holding the Beaumetz sector south of it. A larger allotment of artillery—the whole of the 14th Brigade<sup>55</sup>—had now been given to him. Half-a-company of the I Anzac Cyclist Battalion had been brought up, and the two remaining infantry battalions of Elliott's own brigade (the 57th and 58th, Victoria) were in their turn about to relieve the 29th and 30th.<sup>56</sup>



The night of the 22nd was quiet, but early on the 23rd a "fighting patrol" of the right company of the 29th<sup>57</sup> found the German position crowded with troops, and had just returned to its post on the right, which was separated by a wide gap from those in the village, when, at 4.35, a bomb exploded to the north, followed by other explosions all along the battalion's front. The right flank posts were standing to arms, and, opening fire, held off what appeared to be two waves of

**Beaumetz  
counter-  
attacked**

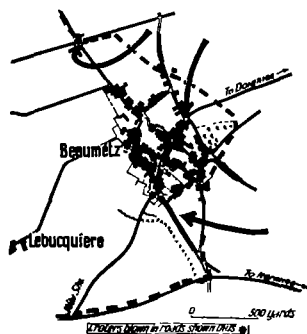
<sup>55</sup> 53rd, 54th, 55th, and 114th (howitzer) Batteries. The 4th Battery was now recalled to its proper brigade.

<sup>56</sup> The 60th was in reserve, preparing for the Lagnicourt attack. The 59th was right flank guard. The 15th Light Trench Mortar Battery also had been brought up, but neither of the Australian columns found it easy to employ its trench mortars in this class of warfare.

<sup>57</sup> The patrol was under Lieut N. L. Jackson (of Port Melbourne, Vic; killed in action on 23 July, 1918), and included two NCO's and fourteen men.

the enemy, but then found Germans moving in their rear. They accordingly fell back towards the south-west corner of Beaumetz, and ten minutes later, on seeing the enemy advance through the village, withdrew about half-way to Lebucquière. Meanwhile, at the eastern exit of the village, a machine-gun officer, Lieutenant Trevan,<sup>58</sup> who was in the act of taking one of two local guns to an advanced emplacement for daylight sniping, found himself and his men surrounded by a crowd of German infantry. They charged through it, and, with some loss, carried their gun back. The northern company of the 29th had been driven from its posts, and one of its officers reached the headquarters of Colonel Clark of the 30th, in Lebucquière, with a report that the 29th had been cut to pieces and the Germans were moving on Lebucquière. Meanwhile the 30th, north of the Cambrai road, had also been attacked. While Colonel Clark was telephoning to his right company for information as to the bombing which he could hear, the company commander, Lieutenant Adams,<sup>59</sup> broke off the conversation with: "They're coming at me—I must go." A party of the enemy approaching from Beaumetz had from the rear rushed the company's right post in a crater on the Cambrai road, killing the garrison,<sup>60</sup> and seizing the Lewis gun.

The report that Beaumetz had been lost reached Elliott in Frémicourt about 5.30. He immediately ordered the 59th in Bancourt to move up and restore the line, and the 57th in Riencourt-les-Bapaume to stand ready. By 6.30, however, he knew that the troops on the spot were turning defeat into success. Although the Germans had broken through both flanks of the 29th and their southern party had entered the village from the Australian rear, they had encountered in its



*Cambrai road is at top of sketch.  
Outposts shown by broken line  
Arrows show points of penetration.*

<sup>58</sup> Capt. H. Trevan, M.C. Aust. Flying Corps. Electric wireman, of Kerang and South Yarra, Vic.; b. Kingston, Vic., 12 May, 1897.

<sup>59</sup> Capt. E. Adams, M.C.; 30th Bn. Engineer; of Newcastle, N.S.W.; b. Manchester, Eng., 28 Aug., 1887. Killed in action, 18 March, 1918.

<sup>60</sup> Except two, who feigned death while the Germans trod over them.



streets deadly fire from Lewis guns. Captain Booth<sup>61</sup> of the left company had his headquarters in the village, and stiff fighting took place. Major McArthur,<sup>62</sup> commanding the forward companies, with his headquarters staff watching the fight from Lebucquière, suddenly saw an Australian officer (Lieutenant Harrison<sup>63</sup>) with a dozen men dash round the south-eastern outskirts and charge the enemy who were holding a knoll west of the town. There was a short bayonet tussle—the shouts and screams could be heard—and the enemy fled back towards their supports who were approaching from the Cambrai road. North of that road, Lieutenant Adams with the right of the 30th, and Lieutenant White with its support company, were also counter-attacking. The Germans fell back, and Adams's party bombed them out of their crater on the Cambrai road. The 29th recaptured its neighbour's lost Lewis gun; and by 5 o'clock, except south of Beaumetz, where the Germans had seized the crater on the railway crossing and established a machine-gun post, the former line had been entirely recaptured. No reserves<sup>64</sup> had been used, and the Australians had suffered only slight loss—12 killed, 38 wounded. The men in two advanced listening-posts of the 29th had been captured by the enemy; but, as against this, 11 Germans had been taken and over 50 lay dead in the streets and about the village.

The audacity of this German attack affected Elliott like a personal affront. "I'll teach these beggars to leave me alone," he said, and, in defiance of the injunction that he must advance no farther until ordered to do so, he actually issued orders for an immediate assault on Doignies and Louverval. By his instruction, no word of this order was at first sent to divisional headquarters, and consequently the troops on either flank and their artillery were not warned. The proposed operation—a daylight advance, with little artillery support, against the main German outpost-line—offered every chance of a severe repulse. Eventually the brigade-major, Wieck, informed the brigadier

<sup>61</sup> Capt. E. R. Booth, 29th Bn. Engineering student; of Footscray, Vic., b. Ascot Vale, Vic., 25 Oct., 1801. Killed in action, 23 March, 1917.

<sup>62</sup> Col. J. McArthur, D.S.O., O.B.E. Commanded 29th Bn., 1918 31st Bn., 1918 Member of Aust. Permanent Forces; of Helidon, Q'land, and East Kew, Vic.; b. Bannockburn, Scotland, 6 April, 1875.

<sup>63</sup> Lieut. H. A. Harrison, M.C.; 29th Bn. Clerk; of Kew and Surrey Hills, Vic.; b. Port Fairy, Vic., 23 April, 1884. (His men were a few light horsemen from New South Wales, who had joined the battalion on the previous night.)

<sup>64</sup> The reserve company of the 29th was sent forward, but by that time the village had been cleared. Orders to counter-attack were also given to the 59th Battalion

that, if the latter did not notify divisional headquarters of the impending attack, he himself would do so. After a few moments' silence Elliott agreed. Major-General Hobbs was informed, and, hurrying to Elliott's headquarters, cancelled the operation.<sup>65</sup> What passed between them was known to them only; but, despite Elliott's magnificent qualities of leadership—in some ways unequalled in the A.I.F.—not every superior could, like Hobbs, after so flagrant disobedience have continued to accord to him his confidence and support.

The Germans, having failed to recapture Beaumetz, shelled it persistently during March 23rd, causing considerable loss.<sup>66</sup> That night the 57th Battalion relieved the 29th, and the 58th the 30th. At 4 a.m. on the 24th the Germans launched a second

**Germans** attempt to retake the village, this time after  
**attack again** an hour's bombardment. They again attacked on both flanks, and, as before, their right, advancing up the valley leading into the village from the north-east, drove back the outposts there and reached that edge of the village. This time, however, they did not penetrate it, the few Australians from the posts continuing to hold the houses and the cemetery, on the eastern edge of the town. At day-break a portion of the attacking force was seen sheltering in the sunken way leading from the cemetery to the Cambrai road. An Australian machine-gun fired from the cemetery<sup>67</sup> straight into this party, killing and wounding a number, and thus again, without the assistance of reserves,<sup>68</sup> the garrison drove the enemy clear of all except two or three cottages by the side of this road. Men continued to be hit during the day by shots fired from these buildings, until Lieutenant Trevan, looking for a position for his machine-gun, located two German snipers in the nearest house and shot both.<sup>69</sup> Some of the enemy still remained in the last cottage on this road. Trench-mortars were sent for, but

<sup>65</sup> A telegram cancelling it was first sent. Leave was subsequently given for an attack on Doignies and Louverval that night, in accordance with a plan already discussed by Elliott with Birdwood, but this permission was soon afterwards revoked. The 59th and 60th Battalions, which had moved up on receipt of Elliott's order, were sent back.

<sup>66</sup> Among those killed was Capt Booth, whose company had held the town.

<sup>67</sup> It had originally been emplaced on the trees felled across the sunken road, but had been slightly withdrawn.

<sup>68</sup> General Elliott warned his squadron of light horse and the cyclists and 59th Battalion, but there proved to be no need for their employment.

<sup>69</sup> Trevan shot the first with the last cartridge in his rifle. The other ran, but Trevan, using the rifle of the dead German, shot him also. These two snipers had accounted for at least eight Australians.

before they arrived a field-gun<sup>70</sup> was brought up to within 500 yards and, with a single high-explosive shell, wrecked the interior of the house and suppressed the opposition.<sup>71</sup> The line on that flank was thus completely recovered.

On the southern flank the Germans had attempted to attack from the direction of the crater at the railway crossing. Their advance had been immediately held up, and they were observed, after day-break, crowded into the sunken road leading to the crossing. A machine-gun at Vélú station, 900 yards along the same railway, was turned upon the mass, and it became disorganised. As this foothold, less than half-a-mile south of the edge of Beaumetz, still afforded the enemy a tempting vantage-point from which to counter-attack, Elliott obtained permission to capture it. This was achieved by an advance of the 59th Battalion across the open from Vélú at 3.45 the same afternoon—

a very pretty little attack (Elliott afterwards wrote) . . . brilliant sunshine, green meadows, with overhead artillery and machine-gun fire, the men moving in artillery formation under shell-fire and then breaking into lines of scouts and skirmishers as they came under musketry fire. They advanced by rushes, the sections supporting by covering fire.

The 59th suffered 40 casualties, mostly slight, but the Germans at the crater fled; a large number were caught in the open by the 8th Battery,<sup>72</sup> and others by a machine-gun. Intense fire was poured upon them, and it was believed at the time that few could have escaped. Seven prisoners were made. That night the line north-east of Beaumetz was slightly advanced through the capture, by a party of the 57th, of an isolated farm-house at the junction of the Beaumetz-Quéant and Cambrai roads, the 58th farther north conforming. The casualties of Elliott's column<sup>73</sup> in the fighting of March 23rd were 78, and on the 24th 73.

The German policy during this stage of the operations is now well known, and proves, if proof were required, that Haig's soldierly precautions against exposing his advancing armies to a counter-thrust were justified to the hilt. Both Ludendorff and Hindenburg had longed to hit back suddenly and inflict a sharp defeat on the forces following them, so as "to wipe out our confession of weakness by a great tactical success." The Crown Prince Rupprecht favoured a blow

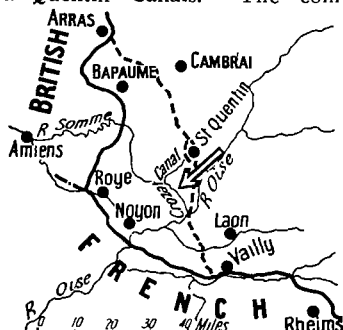
<sup>70</sup> Single guns in advanced positions were used throughout the Beaumetz operations.

<sup>71</sup> This house is shown in the plate opposite, and in *Vol. XII (plate 298)*.

<sup>72</sup> The 8th Battery had been sent to Elliott on the afternoon of March 23.

<sup>73</sup> On March 23 the 20th and 30th Battalions lost 50 killed and wounded, and the 15th Brigade 28. On March 24 the casualties were all in the 15th Brigade.

north and south of St. Quentin to crush the following troops after they had crossed the Crozat and St. Quentin Canals. The commanders of the First and Second German Armies both approved of this plan because, unlike an attack on the English crossing the Somme, it could be delivered from the Hindenburg Line. Ludendorff, however, reluctantly decided that the German Army had then neither the numerical nor the moral strength for a major counter-stroke; Prince Rupprecht had to confine himself to a plan of attacking the French, when they crossed the Crozat Canal, and of damaging by small thrusts the forces approaching elsewhere. Advanced detachments of the French, pressing forward eagerly in the hope of saving their country-side from devastation, far out-distanced the Fourth British Army,<sup>74</sup> and on March 21 threw light forces across the Crozat Canal. The orders from Prince Rupprecht were to wait until a fairly strong force with artillery had crossed, but, not understanding this, the XVII German Army Corps attacked early next morning, and, although the French were driven back across the canal, few prisoners were taken.<sup>75</sup> The plan for a fairly formidable stroke thus miscarried. Subordinate commanders had, however, on March 19 been ordered to take immediate advantage of enemy indiscretions,<sup>76</sup> and to hold up the advance in the country west of the Hindenburg Line so that the troops working upon its defences might remain as long as possible undisturbed.<sup>77</sup> It was accordingly decided to hold the line of villages—Henin, Croisilles, Ecois-Longatte, Noreuil, Lagnicourt, Louverval, Doignies, Hermies—longer than had previously been intended. On March 20 the Guard Reserve Corps ordered its divisions not to allow their opponents to cross this line. The corps staff noted that the Australians were then very close to Beaumetz—a fact which occasioned the issue of the corps order. The divisions were ordered to reinforce their rear-guards, and did so by sending up several companies of infantry and a few guns. By then, Beaumetz had just been abandoned,<sup>78</sup> and, though it was not in the main rear-guard line, the 38th Division was ordered to retake it. The first counter-attack was made by a detachment of the divisional storm-troops, together with the 5th and 6th companies of the 95th I.R.



Arrow shows the German thrust.

<sup>74</sup> Although the French appeared to the Germans astonishingly slow in discovering the withdrawal, they had by March 19 advanced twenty-five miles, and near Ham captured a German convoy.

<sup>75</sup> One account states 230. Prince Rupprecht's diary for that day says 60.

<sup>76</sup> Prince Rupprecht states (*Mein Kriegstagebuch, Vol. II, p. 117*) that the attacks were to be in the nature of sallies by the outposts of a fortress.

<sup>77</sup> It had been found necessary, at a late stage, to add important outworks, enclosing the villages of Queant and Pronville, and, farther south, fringing the Canal du Nord near Hermies. This new German "Balcony Trench" practically formed part of the Hindenburg Line, and is so designated in many sketches in this volume. See p. 258.

<sup>78</sup> The German official *communiqué* implied that Beaumetz was given up in accordance with the plans. If this is true, the plan was immediately changed. On one of the Germans shot by Lieut. Trevan was found a diary with the entry "22nd March Arrived Boursies. Are to go forward to-night or tomorrow to recapture Beaumetz, which has been given up to the English too soon. Frid. 23rd March—Beaumetz held too strongly, probably another attempt to-day."

These attacked in two bodies, each about 100 strong, advancing from north-east and south-east respectively, but were beaten back (says a German account) with severe loss by machine-gun fire in the village. The counter-attack next day was headed by a detachment, fifty strong, from the "2nd Company, 1st Sturm Battalion," specially brought up from near Valenciennes. This was supported by the remaining two companies of the 95th I.R., sent up from Bourlon with orders to hold the village when the storm-detachments should have captured it. These companies lost their way and could not find the 5th and 6th companies. They wandered over the open south-east of Beaumetz, and had just extended to advance when they came under heavy machine-gun and rifle fire and withdrew. The storm-troops made their way along the Cambrai road and entered Beaumetz, but failed through strong machine-gun fire in the village.

On March 24th a change came over the operations of the Fourth Army, through the employment by it of the 5th British Cavalry Division, temporarily and somewhat reluctantly<sup>79</sup> allotted to it by Haig in order to hasten the advance. The Canadian Cavalry Brigade, a body of especially enterprising troops, with the Umballa brigade on its flank, quickly advanced the line, and by March 28th, when the division was withdrawn, the Fourth Army's front, though not yet as close to the Hindenburg Line as that of the Fifth Army, ran straight from Bertincourt to the neighbourhood of Savy, three and a half miles south-west of St. Quentin.

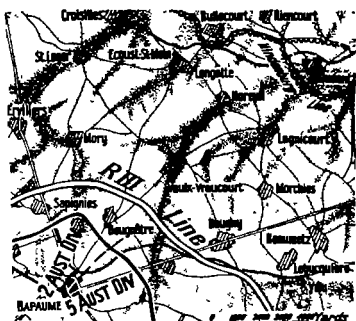
Elliott's column had, since the capture of Beaumetz, been confronted by the main line of the German rear-guard in Doignies, Louverval, and Hermies, held by outposts much stronger than those previously encountered in following up the German withdrawal. Before, however, describing the final task of the column—the forcing of this outpost line—the narrative must turn to the left column of I Anzac, which since March 21st had been somewhat less advanced than the right.

When on March 17th the order to form the advanced guards was received by the divisions, Brigadier-General Gellibrand, appointed to command the left  
**Left Column—** (2nd Division's) column, already had one of  
**Favreuil,** the allotted battalions, the 23rd, holding the  
**Sapignies,** the advanced line north of Bapaume. Its patrols,  
**Beugnâtre** continuing, as part of the advanced guard, the  
 operations in which they were already employed, ascertained at 11 p.m. that the Germans, who had all day been opposing

<sup>79</sup> Haig wished to keep his cavalry intact for the Arras offensive.

it from the copse and the neighbouring belt of wire, had vanished. Ahead, the village of Favreuil was found silent and deserted, and was forthwith occupied by the 23rd. Farther north, patrols of the 5th Australian and 6th British Brigades,<sup>80</sup> sent to Sapignies, observed Germans moving through the village with lanterns, evidently setting fire to places marked for destruction. Before dawn on the 18th this village also was found clear. As the advanced line of the 2nd British Division still lay far in rear of the Australian, General Smyth ordered the 5th Brigade to safeguard Gellibrand's left by holding a line of posts from Favreuil westwards to the British flank. At dawn on the 18th

Gellibrand's restless young officer of engineers, Captain Gilchrist, exploring roads and wells, moved through the village of Beugnâtre, three-quarters of a mile east of Favreuil;<sup>81</sup> patrols also finding the place clear, the 23rd Battalion occupied it. The 29th Lancers<sup>82</sup> reported the enemy holding the R.III line half-a-mile farther on; but the cavalry



farther north were able to turn the flank of these rear parties, and late in the morning, when Gellibrand sent his light horse, now increased to a squadron, to seize two prominent knuckles looking down on the large combined village of Vraucourt and Vaulx-Vraucourt, R.III had been abandoned. British cavalry could be seen patrolling well to the left front towards Mory. The enemy parties in Gellibrand's area retired as soon as the Australians approached, and the light horse reached the two hills, unhindered, except by the long-range fire of a machine-gun from Vaulx-Vraucourt. Early in the afternoon the 21st Battalion, which had marched forward from reserve, took up the task of the vanguard, and, passing through the 23rd, which became the main guard, moved upon that village.

<sup>80</sup> Both brigades were ordered to patrol to Sapignies (which was in the British area—fire from it had held up the British cavalry which was already out on the afternoon of March 17). The patrols wisely carried out the task together.

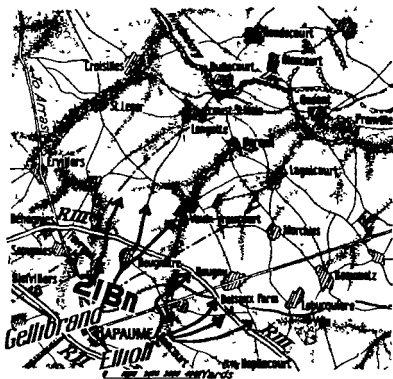
<sup>81</sup> From wheelmarks made since a shower of rain, it was evident that Germans had withdrawn from it since midnight.

<sup>82</sup> Of the Lucknow Cavalry Brigade

The Germans facing Gellibrand were part of a screen similar to that which faced Elliott. The last parties of the 1st Guard Reserve Division had withdrawn from the Barbarossa wire at 11 p.m. on the 17th, their duties being taken over by a screen from two divisions holding the Hindenburg Line behind that sector. Thus the parties to Gellibrand's right front were those of the 91st R.I.R., while those directly in front belonged to the 119th R.I.R. (26th Reserve Division). The withdrawn troops of the 1st Guard Reserve Division believed that they had inflicted heavy loss on the troops attacking them near the "Monument" (5th Australian Infantry Brigade), but actually the loss had been very slight.

The direction of Gellibrand's advance was north-eastward, straight down the long knuckles or the shallow valleys between them. It was in the longest of these valleys, about two miles ahead, that the large village of Vraucourt and Vaulx-Vraucourt lay. Two miles farther on still was the line of hamlets—Lagnicourt, Noreuil, Ecoust St. Mein-Longatte, Noreuil being in the same valley as Vaulx-Vraucourt, and the other two on either side of it.<sup>83</sup> Ecoust-Longatte was just to the left of I Anzac's line of advance, in front of the neighbouring corps, which was also confronted by Croisilles and Henin. All these villages, except part of Ecoust-Longatte, lay in valleys; and about a mile beyond, across valleys and spurs, was the Hindenburg Line, which it was Gough's object to bombard.

On the afternoon of the 18th the 21st Battalion headed out with its three leading companies marching along as many diverging roads, which quickly brought them into positions west of Vaulx-Vraucourt. Patrols of the right company moved forward through and around the village, and on the far side surprised some of the enemy<sup>84</sup> who were about to withdraw to Lagnicourt. The Victorians followed them, firing. Patrols scoured the open ground to the north, sighting



<sup>83</sup> Photographs of Vaulx-Vraucourt, Lagnicourt, and Noreuil are given in Vol XII (plates 300, 306, and 307)

<sup>84</sup> Some were in the act of shaving. Others had their packs on, and were evidently moving off to Lagnicourt.

a few small German cavalry patrols. Information as to these German parties was also given to the company commanders by a British airman, who landed his machine for the purpose at the company headquarters behind Vraucourt. Early in the night the 21st established a line of posts around the two villages, both ends thrown back in loose touch with the columns on either flank.<sup>85</sup>

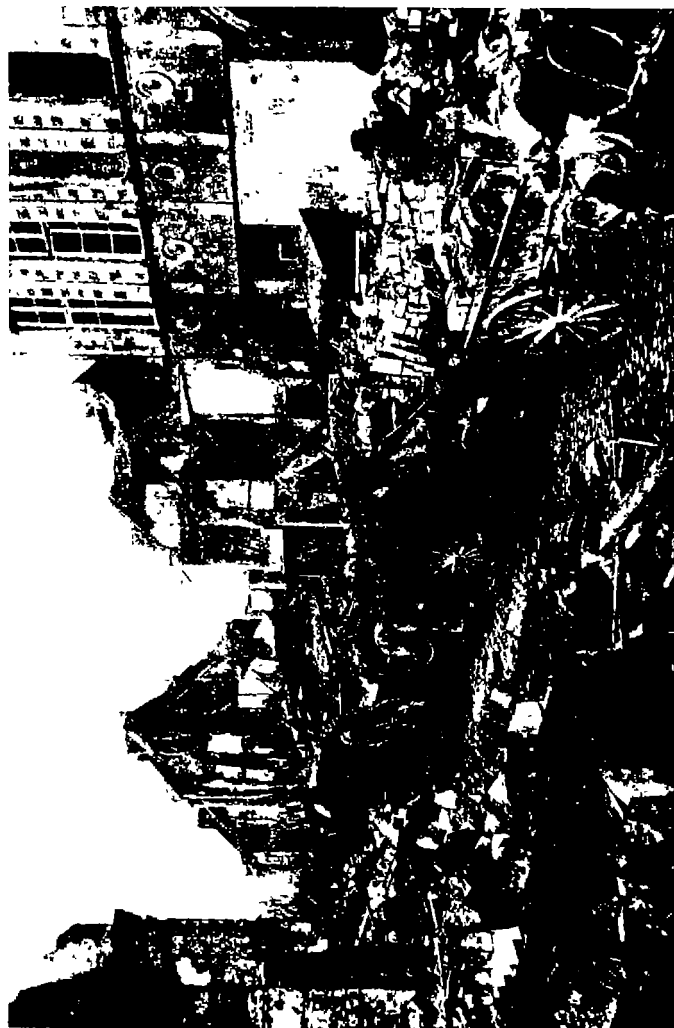
Gellibrand's column had at this stage out-distanced all others on the British front. His position roughly corresponded to that of Elliott two days later, after the capture of Beaumetz, in that—although he did not know it—the main German rear-guard position lay immediately ahead. But there now reached him from 2nd Divisional Headquarters orders based partly on Haig's directions for the establishment of the defensive Bapaume-Péronne line, and partly upon General White's letter cautioning the divisional commanders against too rapid an advance by their columns. General Smyth, always a prudent commander, ordered Gellibrand to fortify Beugnâtre, Favreuil, and the spaces between them,<sup>86</sup> to keep at least two battalions ahead of the advanced batteries, and to move up the reserve battalion as soon as bivouac space could be found for it. Soon after these orders there followed a request for a report showing how far they had already been carried out. These instructions were urgent, and from their nature Gellibrand assumed that, for some reason unknown to him, a defensive attitude was required. He accordingly ordered back the posts beyond Vaulx-Vraucourt, but later, recognising that the urgency was not so great as he had imagined, allowed them to remain. These steps had hardly been taken when there reached him, at 1.57 on the morning of the 19th, a "secret priority" message containing orders of precisely opposite tenor.

This came from Fifth Army Headquarters. News had arrived there that villages were in flames *beyond* the Hindenburg Line, and this suggested that the enemy might intend to withdraw farther. A strong motive could be supposed for this, since it would entirely dislocate the Arras offensive, which the withdrawal to the Hindenburg Line would only in part avoid. As the British command was intent upon

<sup>85</sup> The light horse withdrew before dusk to water at Bapaume.

<sup>86</sup> Wire was to be transferred from the German defences to fill these gaps.





15. BAPAUME AFTER CAPTURE  
Transport halted at the Town Hall

*Aust War Memorial Official Photo No E594*

*To face p 176*



16. THE NORTH-EASTERNMOST HOUSE OF BEAUMETZ, IN WHICH THE LAST PARTY OF GERMANS  
HELD OUT ON 24TH MARCH, 1917, UNTIL THE BUILDING WAS WRECKED BY A  
FIELD-GUN BROUGHT FORWARD

In the background are the trees along the Cambrai road. (*See also Vol. XII, plate 298.*)

*Aust War Memorial Official Photo No. E530.  
Taken on 20th April, 1917.*

*To face p. 177.*

delivering the blow for which so great preparations had been made, G.H.Q. was rendered anxious, and Haig ordered that tests should at once be made by the Third Army, by raiding at various points in front of Arras. But, before that order was issued, Gough, at 11.30 p.m. on March 18th, ordered that the left of his army, in conjunction with the right of the Third, must at once probe to the Hindenburg Line.

The enemy appears to be holding line approximately Vélú, Morchies, Lagnicourt, St. Léger, Boyelles with advanced detachments. Fires are reported at St. Quentin<sup>87</sup> and other places east of the Hindenburg Line. The Lucknow Cavalry Brigade will be pushed forward vigorously at daybreak to Ecoist St. Mein and Croisilles, drive the enemy from these places, and occupy them, throwing out flanking detachments to Lagnicourt. Divisional advanced guards must support the cavalry and drive in all enemy detachments to the Hindenburg Line.

This order, practically unchanged, was sent on to Gellibrand. As it turned out, however, the British cavalry patrols on March 19th were at once held up by the enemy in Ecoist St. Mein, Croisilles, and Henin. No flanking detachment was sent to Lagnicourt, and there was thus no opportunity for the infantry to support them. Germans entrenching themselves between Gellibrand's and Elliott's columns gave some trouble.<sup>88</sup> Two guns each of the 12th and 13th Batteries were brought up behind Vaulx-Vraucourt and turned upon these Germans and upon others south-west of Noreuil. Numbers of the enemy were reported to be working or manœuvring on the hillside close beyond it. The 23rd Battalion was at nightfall again brought forward, this time to share the front with the 21st. The line of posts was pushed well out beyond the twin-villages, which were being constantly shelled by the enemy. Gellibrand and his brigade, which needed rest, were to be relieved during that night and the next day by the 7th Brigade under General Wisdom, whose two leading battalions (25th and 26th) were now close behind the front. Unfortunately, before the relief took place, serious confusion was to occur.

<sup>87</sup> St. Quentin was in reality not beyond the original Siegfried Line.

<sup>88</sup> German cavalry was seen both north of Vaulx-Vraucourt (where it was fired on by a patrol of the 21st) and south-east of the village. Here a patrol of Gellibrand's light horse was fired on from Vaulx Wood. A troop of light horse was sent to reinforce the posts of the 21st at Vaulx-Vraucourt. During the day the posts were engaged in firing on Germans entrenching themselves south-west of the wood and also a few hundred yards north of the village.

On March 19th Gough personally visited the forward area. Parts of the Hindenburg Line were now actually in sight, the russet bands of its great entanglements and chalky spoil heaps from the dugouts marking some of the heights on the horizon. Yet the day's progress had been far less extensive than had been anticipated in Gough's operation order of the previous night. It is true that messages from the front contained ample evidence of an enemy screen holding the villages ahead, but of its strength little was known. Not being satisfied that his order had been energetically complied with, Gough late in the 19th issued a direction that it was to be carried out next day. At 10.35 p.m. I Anzac was informed by telephone that the Fifth Army hoped the troops would get on next day to Lagnicourt and Noreuil. General White at once passed on the order by telephone and endeavoured to postpone the relief of the 6th Brigade, but found that it was too late. The staff officer (G.S.O.2) on duty at the 2nd Division's headquarters, however, rang up Gellibrand and informed him of the wishes of the higher commanders that he should "push on." A written order, modifying in this direction the previous orders, would be sent to him.<sup>89</sup>

There is no doubt as to the purpose of the corps commander: General White had visited Headquarters of the 2nd Division only that day and explained the intention of adhering to the cautious principle of an advance "by bounds" —a method similar to that of a looping caterpillar, patrols being sent forward to occupy certain points, the supporting troops coming up to the patrols, and the patrols then going forward again. The main-guard was to be brought up to the present outpost line and held ready for vigorous manœuvre. But Gellibrand, as the staff of the 2nd Division was well aware, had strongly favoured heavier pressure on the Germans throughout their retreat, with the object of forcing them to

<sup>89</sup> A note in the diary of the General Staff, 2nd Division, states: "G.O.C. 6 Bde. (Gellibrand) informed of corps commander's wishes *re* pushing on. He said patrols would reconnoitre Noreuil and Lagnicourt, leaving at 4 a.m., and that they would be occupied, if this could be done without serious opposition." The formal modified order was duly sent to Gellibrand, but, of course, could not arrive in time to affect any operations immediately undertaken by him. It prescribed that the day's work would be that of sending mounted patrols to ascertain whether Lagnicourt, Noreuil, or Longatte were occupied in strength. If detachments of the enemy were met, Gellibrand was to deal with them vigorously, supporting the light horse with infantry, and advancing on a wide front so as always to envelop the enemy's flanks, avoiding direct attack on machine-guns if any other course was possible.

enter the Hindenburg Line not at their leisure, but as a beaten foe. From the urgency of the message passed to him he at once inferred that he was now required to do what he had so far been restrained from doing, namely, to take the risk of attempting to rush the enemy out of these villages. The staff, he assumed, must intend him to act at once; otherwise he would have been instructed to wait for the relief which would occur that day. Moreover, if the defences of the village were still incomplete, action now might avert casualties later. If, on the other hand, the places were strongly held, the attempt could not be expected to succeed. It must therefore be in the nature of a reconnaissance in force, the commanders taking careful precautions with a view to withdrawing their men if strongly opposed. It also seemed to Gellibrand that the effort must be made before daylight. In plain day, with only two batteries of artillery in support, no troops could hope to approach these villages.

But, seeing that only five and a half hours of darkness remained, Gellibrand's intention must be carried out, if at all, with extreme speed. The commanders of the 21st and 23rd Battalions, who had just stationed their new posts around Vaulx and Vaulx-Vraucourt, and the light horse squadron commander, who had withdrawn his troops for the night to Favreuil, were hurriedly summoned, and a plan of attack explained to them. This plan was daring and ingenious. The land, as already stated, ran in valleys and spurs all leading from the British position through that of the enemy. The valley on Gellibrand's right led to Lagnicourt, two miles away on the western side of the depression. The next valley on the west contained Vaulx-Vraucourt and, farther down, Noreuil. West of Noreuil again was a third depression on the summit of whose western side lay Longatte and Ecoust St. Mein, really a single village. As the columns on each side of him were not sufficiently advanced to enable him to attack the outer villages, Gellibrand decided to surround the one in the centre, Noreuil. Although not more than a mile separated any of these villages from the next, it might be possible by night to pass undetected along the spurs between them. Accordingly the 23rd Battalion, moving down the spur east of Noreuil, would establish two companies on the Noreuil side of the spur, cutting off the village, and would station the other two

somewhat more to the rear on the Lagnicourt side of the spur, to keep off interference from that quarter. The 21st Battalion would make a similar advance along the spur west of Noreuil, two or more companies joining hands with those of the 23rd beyond Noreuil and the remainder holding off interference from Longatte and Ecoust. The lie of the spurs would screen the outer companies from fire from Noreuil, and at the same time



*Plan for capture of Noreuil.*

allow the inner companies to throttle Noreuil without coming under fire from Ecoust-Longatte or Lagnicourt. Patrols of light horse were to precede the infantry. As the Germans had been firing from Vaulx Wood, the two outer companies of the 23rd were to clear it before moving to screen off Lagnicourt. The main operation was to commence at 3 a.m.

Clever though they were, these plans set an impossible task. Troops little trained for open warfare, tired with many days' work, and new to their positions, were to be hurriedly collected and marched out on a prolonged and intricate night advance without special reconnaissance at least by the infantry officers, most of whom knew the ground only from a hurried glance at the map. The forward companies had settled into their new posts and the reserve companies were bivouacked for a night's rest in rear of the village when, after midnight, the first word of the intended reconnaissance reached them.<sup>90</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel Bateman,<sup>91</sup> commander of the right battalion, the 23rd, at once summoned his company commanders to his headquarters.

The night was wet and dark. It was after 1 o'clock before this conference could be held, and at least two company commanders protested that their men could not be assembled in the time allotted. The plans were explained. The movement against Noreuil would be undertaken by the two companies at present holding the outpost-line; the two support companies

<sup>90</sup> Verbal orders reached the battalion commanders at 12.15 a.m.

<sup>91</sup> Lieut.-Col. W. J. Bateman. Commanded 23rd Bn, 1917; 19th and 17th Bns., 1918. Schoolmaster; of Maryborough, Vic.; b. Donald, Vic., 8 March, 1878.

would, as a preliminary, clear the Bois de Vaulx and then advance on Lagnicourt. Gellibrand's young engineer,<sup>92</sup> Captain Gilchrist, who was present, and who strongly affirmed that both villages were held only by snipers, would guide the leading company beyond Noreuil. But, in the hurried announcement of the plans, the company commanders received the impression that Lagnicourt was to be not merely engaged, but captured. Later, when it became evident that the troops could not be collected by 3, the starting hour was postponed by Gellibrand until 4,<sup>93</sup> when it would still be dark.<sup>94</sup> Both battalion commanders were asked to inform the brigadier if they could not assemble their troops by that hour. At a late stage word came from Colonel Forbes of the 21st that owing to the bad weather he had been unable to do so; he therefore asked if the operation could be cancelled. But by then the 23rd had moved, and the 21st had to go forward late.

A cold rain was drizzling as the support companies of the 23rd wound their way in single file through the streets of Vaulx-Vraucourt, littered with the débris of demolished walls. They succeeded in finding their way to the assembly-ground, but dawn was already breaking when their waves silently advanced, without artillery barrage, against Vaulx Wood. The Germans may have withdrawn at the approach of the scouts, for the companies passed through without a shot being fired. But when they moved down the depression beyond, to attack Lagnicourt, a mile distant, flares were rising from that village and a machine-gun opened there. Here the two companies separated to continue their attack down opposite sides of the valley.

It had been intended that, after clearing Vaulx Wood, they should form up behind the two outpost companies, and that all should move together in the main advance. But the leading outpost company, under Captain Pascoe,<sup>95</sup> in whose area the point of assembly lay, after waiting for a quarter of an hour for the rest of the battalion, which did not arrive, had been ordered by Colonel Bateman to begin the advance. The light

<sup>92</sup> Gilchrist commanded the half of the 6th Field Company which was serving with Gellibrand, but in practice he worked as an officer of the brigade staff.

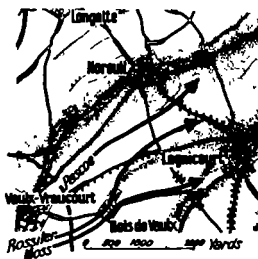
<sup>93</sup> It is doubtful if this order reached the leading company of the 23rd.

<sup>94</sup> This was true time. "Summer" time came in on March 24.

<sup>95</sup> Major J. Pascoe, M.C.; 23rd Bn. Contractor; of Ballarat, Vic.; b. Ballarat, 28 Feb., 1885.

horse detachments, which were expected to patrol ahead, had not arrived, but this company met no opposition until it had almost reached its objective. At daybreak it was crossing in single file the low ground beside Noreuil. Pascoe, who had no instructions as to what he should do on reaching the objective, had given the order to push on,<sup>96</sup> when a machine-gun post was seen on the high ground close ahead. The troops accordingly extended to outflank it.

Machine-guns both in Lagnicourt and Noreuil could now be heard firing in some other direction, and flares were rising. The two Lagnicourt companies, though out of sight of Pascoe, had advanced down their valley.<sup>97</sup> The right company (Lieutenant Moss<sup>98</sup>), moving over level open ground straight towards the main defences of the village, was stopped by fire from which, having no shelter, it suffered heavy loss. Probably it diverted the enemy's attention from the next company (Captain Rossiter<sup>99</sup>), which advanced, practically without opposition, along the west side of the depression, past that edge of Lagnicourt. Two German machine-gun posts—one in a sunken road on its right,<sup>100</sup> and the other in the Lagnicourt–Noreuil road ahead—fled to the village as it approached. The company reached the latter road, which also was sunken, and lined it. The light was now clear. Lagnicourt seemed from this side to be weakly held, and Captain Rossiter, after stationing a post on the crest to guard against interference from Noreuil, led



<sup>96</sup> The company had moved at first in fours; then, approaching a suspected machine-gun post, it had extended. On passing the site of the post and finding it abandoned, it formed fours again. Approaching Noreuil, whence flares were rising, it halted. The battalion commander went off to his headquarters, and Captain Pascoe called his subalterns together for final directions. While speaking to them, he realised that there "was something on their minds." He found that they were "not impressed by the statement that Noreuil was occupied only by a few snipers." The number of flares rising, and a machine-gun chattering, rendered these doubts natural, but the light was increasing, there was no time for hesitation, and he could only say: "You have my instructions—we are going to see this thing through." The characteristic reply from the four subalterns was: "You bet!" From this point the company proceeded in single file.

<sup>97</sup> They had formed up on the Noreuil–Morchies road in the Lagnicourt valley, but out of touch with one another.

<sup>98</sup> Lieut.-Col. R. G. Moss, M.C., 23rd Bn. Police constable; of Bairnsdale, Vic.; b. Jeetho, Vic., 16 July, 1892.

<sup>99</sup> Capt. T. F. Rossiter, M.B.E., 23rd Bn. Clerk; of St. Kilda, Vic.; b. South Yarra, Vic., 17 Oct., 1886.

<sup>100</sup> The Vaulx-Vraucourt–Lagnicourt road.



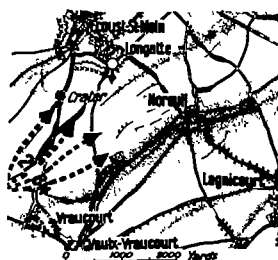
his men to the right straight down the road towards Lagnicourt. The enemy seemed unaware of his presence, for a German soldier strolling casually up the road almost walked into him. The man fled, but was shot down, and possibly the shots called the enemy's attention, for Germans with machine-guns came running through the village. As the Victorians rounded the last bend of the road, they ran straight into the fire of one of these guns. The leading files were killed; those following escaped by creeping back up the road under cover of its muddy banks. Thus, in spite of uncertainty as to the plans, two companies of the 23rd had reached approximately their intended positions. The third (Moss's) was held up in front of Lagnicourt. The fourth, which should have advanced with Pascoe's, had lost its way.

The task of the 21st was more difficult, since the defended villages on that flank lay closer together and the depression between them, shown on the map, hardly existed. Starting at 4.30 from the Vraucourt sugar factory,<sup>101</sup> the battalion marched along the sunken road towards Ecoust and Longatte until, about day-break, its leading company (under Captain O. A. Jones, of Mouquet Farm fame) was stopped by shots fired into the advance party by a German post in a mine-crater farther up the road. This post was at about the point where the second and third companies were to leave the road and strike across country to enclose Noreuil. They climbed out on the right side of the road, as the fourth had already done, and, deploying their platoons one behind the other, continued to advance. As the light was increasing, they presently turned right, towards Noreuil.

But this turn was made too soon, with the result that they headed towards the southern, rather than the northern, end of the village. Moving over the spur, they came into such heavy machine-gun fire from left and front that losses were severe. Men tended to fling themselves down, and the advance could only proceed by rushes. Captain Sale tried to organise the centre company into groups which would alternately cover with Lewis-gun fire each other's advance, but to improvise this system under a sharp fusillade,

<sup>101</sup> Col. Forbes at this stage advanced his headquarters to the sugar factory. His second-in-command, Major H. A. Crowther (of Brighton, Vic.), was throughout in general charge of the 21st's forward area

with officers and N.C.O's falling, was no easy matter. When one group rose, others, instead of firing, rushed forward also, offering an easy target. At this stage a snow-storm descended, half blotting out the targets, and the advance was stopped, the three companies<sup>102</sup> forming a rough line with its right 500 yards south-west of Noreuil. Meanwhile Captain Jones's company was splendidly fulfilling its task. After rushing the Germans in the crater, most of whom fled, it had pushed on until in close touch with the enemy's outposts round Ecoust and Longatte.<sup>103</sup> Here, continuously engaging the enemy, whose snipers caused much loss, it dug in.



The plan had thus failed; indeed, Captain Pascoe's company of the 23rd had already been recalled from the other side of Noreuil, an order from Colonel Bateman for withdrawal having reached Pascoe as he was beginning to envelop the machine-gun post already mentioned.<sup>104</sup> He succeeded in falling back with the loss of only one man killed to the Lagnicourt-Noreuil road, already held on the right by Captain Rossiter's company. Despite the indignation of Captain Gilchrist, who strode up and down the road-bank protesting, the withdrawal was continued, on orders from Colonel Bateman, back to the starting-point.<sup>105</sup> This hazardous movement was partly screened from the enemy by the snow-shower which fell at about 5.30.

Being still uncertain whether Noreuil was strongly held, Colonel Bateman now sent the withdrawn companies over the spur to move against it from the front. As the troops reached the sky-line, they came under fire from machine-guns in the far side of Noreuil and also from their right, where the enemy

<sup>102</sup> Under Captains J. W. Pearce, F. Sale, and E. M. Bland. (Pearce belonged to Ballarat, Vic.; Sale to Melbourne; and Bland to Brighton, Vic.)

<sup>103</sup> One of its Lewis gunners, Private B. Collins (of Berwick, Vic.), silenced with his gun an enemy machine-gun, and then dashed in, threw a bomb into the shelter of the crew, and brought back the lock of the German gun. On the left flank Lieut. W. E. Hardwick met another German post.

<sup>104</sup> P 182.

<sup>105</sup> Although Gilchrist thought that the road could have been held, this would have involved extreme risk.

had re-established himself on the spur which they were crossing. They nevertheless pushed some way down the slope, studded with small manure-heaps, behind which they presently threw themselves. An enemy battery<sup>106</sup> was sharply shelling them. Gilchrist, moving boldly from one party to another, quickly grasped the situation, and telephoned to Gellibrand. About the same time, at 8.20, a message reached Colonel Bateman from some of the company officers who had found the 21st also held up. It stated that no further advance could be made without very heavy casualties. He accordingly abandoned an intention to have the effort renewed at 8.30,<sup>107</sup> and Gellibrand, on being informed, ordered the troops to fall back and dig an outpost-line half-a-mile in advance of the previous night's positions. This withdrawal from close contact with some of the enemy's posts was difficult, but Gellibrand's advanced guns assisted by suppressing the dangerous machine-gun farther along the spur;<sup>108</sup> and, by dribbling men back in twos and threes, the infantry extricated itself with slight loss.



Divisional and corps headquarters were quite unaware that an important operation was being attempted. The first news came in telegrams from Gellibrand:

5.30 a.m. Advance guard moving forward to establish a line running north-west and south-east through Noreuil and co-operating with troops on flanks in support of 13th Light Horse patrols.

Untimed. 23rd Battalion reach Noreuil at 5.30 a.m.

9.33. Line of villages in my front held by infantry with machine-guns and artillery. Casualties in closing on villages are about 150. Am now falling back to the general line . . . (there follow particulars of the line taken up).

At 11.45 Gellibrand reported that he thought Noreuil was held by 150 Germans with from four to six machine-guns. Longatte also was held by the enemy. The Germans were supported

<sup>106</sup> A battery of German field-guns, several 4.2's, and a trench-mortar were firing.

<sup>107</sup> The three companies of the 21st in front of Noreuil had independently made a second effort. Capt Pearce had suggested to his colleagues that the companies should reorganise in dead ground occupied by his own men near Vraucourt Copse. The second attempt was made after this reorganisation, but was stopped by machine-guns.

<sup>108</sup> The artillery observers also directed these guns on such other parties of the enemy as they saw.

by both field and heavy artillery, and he would therefore wait for the divisions on his flanks to close up before trying again.

To Birdwood and Smyth the unexpected news of this engagement and of the casualties suffered—which were eventually found to be more than twice as severe as Gellibrand at first believed, totalling 13 officers and 318 others<sup>109</sup>—came as a shock, especially as 50 men were missing.<sup>110</sup> Despite White's advocacy, Gellibrand never regained with Birdwood the high opinion and confidence which his vigour in previous stages of the pursuit had won. To the troops, whose morale, notwithstanding their previous labours, was very high, no blame could be attached; their performance calls rather for astonishment, and suggests that, if the attack had been deferred till the following night, the plan clearly explained and the ground closely reconnoitred, the operation—confused nightmare though it was when so hastily initiated—might have succeeded. The true blame appears to lie mainly with Gellibrand, who, reading into the order an imaginary implication, undertook a hazardous operation with insufficient time for its performance, but partly with the staff of the 2nd Division, which, knowing Gellibrand's inclination, had forwarded Gough's order in a manner that left an opening for misinterpretation as to the method of its performance.<sup>111</sup> Gough probably did require some risk to be taken, and he accepted the result of this action and that of the cavalry, who also were prevented by machine-guns from penetrating between Henin, Croisilles, and Ecoast, as conclusive.<sup>112</sup> At a conference between him and his corps commanders on the evening of March 20th it was agreed: "It is evident that we cannot 'rush' the defence any further than we have now done. The line of villages Beaumetz-Lagnicourt-Noreuil-Ecoast St. Mein-Croisilles must be carried before Hindenburg Line can be attacked. This to be done independently by Corps as their artillery can be got up."

<sup>109</sup> Only 38 were killed. Among these were Lieutenant D. S. Evans (of Bal-larat, Vic.), acting-adjutant of the 23rd, who was shot when going out to Rossister's company before Lagnicourt, and Lieutenants E. N. Haggart (of Sarsfield, Vic.) of the 21st and P. J. Rodriguez (of Broome, W. Aust.) of the 23rd.

<sup>110</sup> A number of the 23rd were captured, some unaware of the order to retire, others unable to carry it out.

<sup>111</sup> The battalion commanders may be criticised for not having immediately pointed out that the time for assembly was too short, but Gellibrand was not one to whom such a statement could be lightly made.

<sup>112</sup> On March 24, however, at a conference with Haig, he stated his belief that the Hindenburg Line in his front was held by the Germans as a rear-guard position.

A careful narrative of this fight from the German side is given in the history of the 119th R.I.R.<sup>113</sup> (26th Reserve Division), whose third battalion held, with two companies and six machine-guns,<sup>114</sup> Noreuil and Ecoust-Longatte. The villages were regarded as outposts of the Hindenburg Line, and since the morning of March 18 no German forces except patrols and small posts had been in advance of them. The orders of the two companies were to repel mere reconnaissances, but, if more heavily attacked, to fall back, without serious resistance, on the Hindenburg Line. Farther south, Lagnicourt was held by the III/91st R.I.R. (2nd Guard Reserve Division) with one company and three machine-guns. The garrison of Noreuil and Ecoust had, for immediate support, two guns of the 26th Field Artillery Regiment, emplaced in a railway cutting close behind Ecoust.

On March 18 the patrols of the 119th R.I.R. had watched the Australian light horse and infantry advancing on Beugny and Vaulx, and after the capture of St. Léger on the 19th the garrisons of Ecoust and Noreuil realised that they might be attacked next day. At 4 a.m. on the 20th (according to the German account<sup>115</sup>), while it was still dark, a patrol of the 121st R.I.R.<sup>116</sup> in the road leading from Vraucourt sugar factory to Ecoust ran into the advanced party of the 21st Australian battalion advancing under cover of the trees felled along the road. The Wurttembergers manned the crater and held it, but presently, observing the attacking waves opening out, and being short of ammunition, fell back on the picquet of the 12th company. Other advanced German posts kept up a "murderous" fire, but their machine-guns had only 2,000 rounds, and they too fell back. The field-guns in the railway cutting now opened, but, although their guns caused some confusion, they could not stop the Australian advance. The position, says the German narrative, was "critical,"<sup>117</sup> for mere rifle-fire "could make no impression." But at this juncture the observers of several German batteries happened to visit the 12th company commander. Their batteries were forthwith turned on, and to this the writer attributes the repulse of the 21st's attack, and of its renewed effort at 9 a.m..

Opposite the 23rd, at Noreuil, the alarm is said not to have been given until 4.45, when an advanced post on the Noreuil-Morchies road saw the Victorians making along the ridge towards Lagnicourt. The forward posts with their machine-guns ran back to the picquets on the edge of the villages, and, as at Ecoust, some of their abandoned positions were occupied by the Australians. A platoon of the 9th company of the 119th R.I.R. was hurried forward to reinforce, and later, both at Ecoust and Noreuil, definite counter-attacks were made to regain the lost positions. The German artillery threw a barrage on and in rear of the captured crater on the Ecoust road, while a "storm-detachment," twenty strong, endeavoured to rush it. The

<sup>113</sup> *Das Württ. R.I.R. Nr. 119 im Weltkrieg, 1914-1918* by Matthaus Gerster, pp. 73-5.

<sup>114</sup> That is, those of the 3rd M.G. Company of the regiment. There were also attached to the battalion a half-squadron of the 20th Uhlán Regiment, and a platoon of the Wurttemberg Cyclist Company.

<sup>115</sup> The time must actually have been a little later.

<sup>116</sup> Parts of this regiment used to relieve or reinforce parts of the 119th R.I.R. in Noreuil.

<sup>117</sup> The Australians observed fires to break out in the villages, as if the Germans were preparing to abandon them. According to the German account, a pioneer "lost his head," and destroyed several wells, rendering the water afterwards undrinkable



latter should wait no longer, but should attack on March 26th. The British were now merely to bombard Ecooust at the hour of the attack. The Australians therefore dropped the plan of attacking Noreuil, but would bombard that village to give the impression that it was being assaulted, and would direct their attack upon Lagnicourt alone. The field artillery of the advanced guard was gradually increased to two brigades, the 4th and 5th,<sup>121</sup> grouped under Lieutenant-Colonel Lloyd<sup>122</sup> of the 5th. In addition, three siege batteries and two of sixty-pounders had reached Beugnâtre and Sapignies.<sup>123</sup>

From March 20th to 26th the 7th Australian Infantry Brigade lay in front of Lagnicourt and Noreuil, actively patrolling in preparation. The brigade was hardly recognisable as the same body that had threaded its way to Flers in the rain and dark before the nightmare operations of November 5th. With the changes in command which followed that action, the moral atmosphere, as well as the physical, seemed to have brightened; the self-confidence of the troops had been further heightened by the decisive success of their swift, determined attack at Malt Trench. The change to green sweet country, and the excitement of open warfare, had further sharpened their spirits. The men, coming from the "outer" States, included a fair proportion of country-bred Australians, and at this juncture the cutting edge of the 7th Brigade was probably keener than that of almost any other in the A.I.F. On the day after it took over, it was further enlivened by watching a combat between four British and five German aeroplanes, "like magpies fighting" (as an Australian put it), only a few hundred feet above the Lagnicourt valley. The men of the 26th were cheering and their officers trying to keep them down, when a German machine came to ground several hundred yards in front of the posts. Several Queenslanders, already racing towards it, succeeded in shooting the pilot, who had started to run down the valley. They found him lying wounded, and to their great elation, as they prepared to carry him to their lines, he told them that he was Prince

<sup>121</sup> As in Elliott's column, field-guns were sent farther forward, either singly or in sections, to "snipe" for the vanguard, returning to their batteries at night.

<sup>122</sup> Brig.-Gen. H. W. Lloyd, C.B., C.M.G., C.V.O., D.S.O., p.s.c. Commanded 12th A.F.A. Bde., 1918, 5th and 1st Div. Art., 1918/19. Officer of Aust. Permanent Forces; of Cremorne, N.S.W.; b. South Yarra, Vic., 24 Nov., 1883.

<sup>123</sup> The 24th, 115th, and 140th Siege, and 24th and 122nd Heavy, Batteries.

Frederick Charles of Prussia. They divided his cap, gloves, and goggles with a couple of light horsemen who also raced up. He was carried to the aid-post; before his death a few days later, in hospital, he thanked the Australians and others concerned for their kindness and "good sportsmanship." He, too, was "a sport," he said.<sup>124</sup>

In the course of their scouting, the 26th and the light horse occupied a particularly useful post, till then held by the enemy, at a crossing of two sunken roads<sup>125</sup> about half-way down the valley towards Lagnicourt. From this vantage-point patrols of the Queenslanders nightly crawled out to make certain that the Germans had not withdrawn their rear-guard.<sup>126</sup> On the night of the 21st an officer with one companion ran into a German post in the north-western entrance to the village.<sup>127</sup> The following night another patrol<sup>128</sup> probed the line of German posts in the same area, while a third,<sup>129</sup> close on its right, examined the orchard hedges, behind some of which the Germans defending the village were evidently entrenched.

<sup>124</sup> Other particulars of the incident are as follows. The prince (according to one of his fellow officers) commanded the 41st Reconnaissance Flight. He was a keen airman, but was not allowed to join a fighting squadron. This day, however, he had telephoned to the commander of a fighting formation and asked if he might fly with him. He received permission, but, being unused to flying in formation, lost his companions in a cloud, and was thus deprived of their protection. He was flying a green single-seater Albatros, painted with skull and cross-bones, when, in a duel so close that they nearly collided, he was shot down by Lieutenant C. E. M. Pickthorn (of London) of No. 32 Squadron, R.F.C. His engine stopped and he landed 200 yards in front of the posts near Vaulx Wood. Corporals B. G. James (of Newmarket, Q'land) and E. J. Powell (of Perth, Tas.; killed in action on 2 Sept., 1918), 26th Battalion, shot him, and Private C. H. H. Hall (of Campbell Town, Tas.) and another ran out and captured him, calling at the same time for stretcher-bearers. Two or three light horsemen galloped up, and it was while they were bending over him that he told them, between his groans, that he was a prince. Major R. G. Legge (of Sydney) and Captain S. W. Neale (of East Kew, Vic.; died of wounds on 29 Sept., 1918) now came up, and the wounded prince, having evidently heard stories circulated as propaganda, asked Legge to ensure that he should not be maltreated by "these Australians."

<sup>125</sup> That from Noreuil to Morchies, and that from Lagnicourt to Beugny. On March 20 a patrol under Sergeant S. Smith (of Cardiff, Wales, and Hobart, Tas.; died 21 Dec., 1925) of the 26th Battalion found the post occupied by the enemy, but next day it was found empty and was seized. The light horse patrol then rode on down the valley to ascertain if the Germans were still in Lagnicourt. Farther down, rifle and machine-gun fire was turned upon them, and, before they got clear, 3 men and 4 horses were killed. That afternoon the Germans tried to re-occupy their post, but were repelled, one being captured.

<sup>126</sup> The Germans also were making special endeavours to find out the intentions of their opponents. Early on March 23 the post of the 7th Brigade in Vraucourt Copse was heavily bombarded and a number of Germans were afterwards seen running forward, and were shot down. The history of the 119th R.I.R. shows that this was a raid attempted by it which "went wrong and brought losses."

<sup>127</sup> Lieut. R. A. Wills (of Byron Bay, N.S.W.) and Corporal O. Andresen (of Bundaberg, Q'land). Shots were exchanged at fifteen yards' range and Wills was hit, but he made his way back and put in his report.

<sup>128</sup> Under Lieut. F. Brand (of Rockhampton, Q'land). The patrol was challenged and fired on at fifty yards. On another patrol Corporal E. V. R. Lee (of Ballina, N.S.W.), with a companion, crawled through the hedges to a long barn, which was found to be empty, though beyond the German outpost-line.

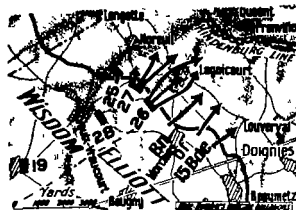
<sup>129</sup> Under Sergeant W. D. Brown (of South Burnie, Tas.).



Sergeant Hickling<sup>130</sup> and Corporal Roberson<sup>131</sup> found the enemy establishing an outlying machine-gun post south-west of the village.<sup>132</sup>

These bold reconnaissances made known to the troops the defence which they might encounter. The patrol reports were checked by aeroplane photographs, of which a good supply now reached the infantry battalions. Moreover the flying corps had established, immediately behind brigade headquarters at Beugnâtre, a landing-ground at which pilots called hourly to confer with the brigade staff. Thus when, on the day before the attack, Captain Cherry of the 26th, watching the place closely, became convinced that there was a trench round its south-eastern corner, a request was made for investigation from the air. A car arrived almost immediately, bringing Lieutenant Cleaver<sup>133</sup> of the 3rd Squadron, R.F.C., and another officer. They asked what question Cherry wished to have answered, motored back to Beugnâtre, flew from there over the village, and within two hours of the request had dropped near battalion headquarters a map marked with the German trench.

The plan of attack was for the 26th (Queensland and Tasmania) to send one company round the right of the village and another round its left, to establish a combined line of posts 800 yards beyond. A third would sweep through the village, and a fourth company was to follow it and "mop up" any Germans left in the place. A company of the 28th (Western Australia) was lent to the 26th for the preliminary duty of clearing the ground ahead of the assembly position and routing out a machine-gun previously located there. This company, with a second in close support, would afterwards act as reserve. On the left of the 26th, the 27th (South Australia) was to advance with two companies along the spur between Lagnicourt and Noreuil, seize the road connecting the villages, and throw a line of outposts beyond, while on the extreme



<sup>130</sup> Sgt. J. R. Hickling (No. 76; 26th Bn.) Station hand; of Eulo, Q'land; b. Thargomindah, Q'land, 24 March, 1892.

<sup>131</sup> Sgt. C. H. Roberson, M.M. (No. 1700; 26th Bn.). Labourer; of Mascot, N.S.W.; b. Lyttelton, N.Z., 1879.

<sup>132</sup> On the night of the 24th, however, the gun was found to have been dismantled

<sup>133</sup> Capt C. T. Cleaver, M.C., D.F.C. Of West Derby, Lancs., Eng.

left a third company extended along the ridge to form a flank looking down on Noreuil. The 25th (Queensland), which under the original plan would have attacked Noreuil, would now merely swing up its right flank to connect with this line. On the right of Lagnicourt General Elliott's column would assist by advancing its left to the Lagnicourt-Beaumetz road and then throwing out a line of posts 1,000 yards farther to the Doignies road, continuing south-eastwards the line of the 7th Brigade. The two chief attacking battalions (26th and 27th) of the 7th Brigade were to assemble in the Noreuil-Morchies road across the Lagnicourt valley, and to make the advance from there to Lagnicourt, three-quarters of a mile away, under cover of field artillery whose eighteen-pounders, opening at 5.15 a.m.,<sup>134</sup> would play for twenty minutes on the village outskirts, its howitzers and the heavy batteries meanwhile shelling the chief cross-roads both in the hamlet and in the country beyond.<sup>135</sup> By then the infantry should have caught up the barrage, which would now advance north-east at the rate of 50 yards in two minutes, with the infantry behind it. The advance would have commenced in the dark, and would end about daybreak. The battalion of Elliott's column on the right would have no prearranged barrage as protection, but a battery of field-guns and one of howitzers<sup>136</sup> were to shoot as it required them.

The night was one of drizzling rain, and so dark that any troops stirring away from well known roads were likely to become lost.<sup>137</sup> The task of moving the companies into position was therefore most difficult, and at the starting hour the left company of the 26th had not arrived and its whereabouts were unknown. The second-in-command of the battalion, Major Robinson, who because of these difficulties had been sent by Lieutenant-Colonel Travers<sup>138</sup> to the starting

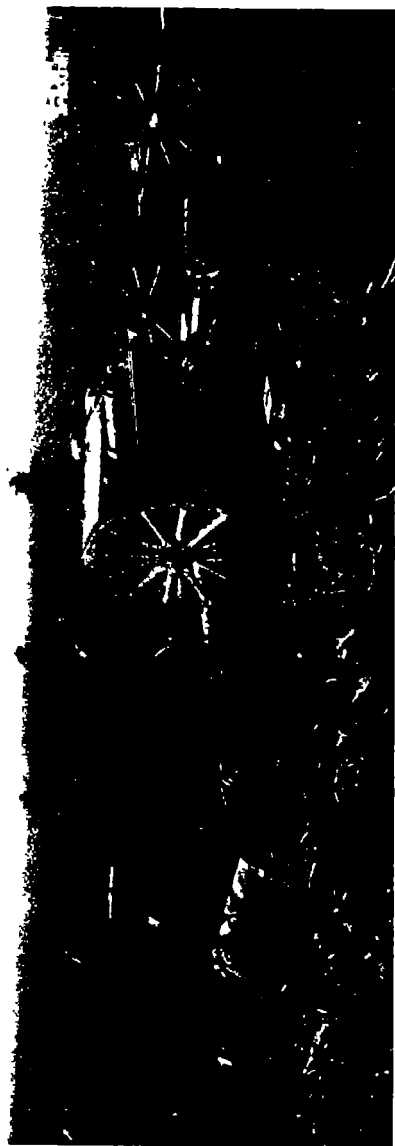
<sup>134</sup> Watches had been advanced on March 24 to "summer" time; 5.15 was therefore really 4.15.

<sup>135</sup> In order to deceive the Germans into imagining that Noreuil also was being attacked, a similar barrage was laid round it by four batteries (the 4th A.F.A. Brigade). The barrage on Lagnicourt was provided by six batteries grouped under Colonel Lloyd's 5th A.F.A. Brigade, and by two of Elliott's column, the 54th and 55th, which enfiladed the roads south-east of the town.

<sup>136</sup> These were the remaining batteries (53rd and 114th) of the 14th A.F.A. Brigade. They were also to fire upon any good target that offered. Elliott's heavy howitzers (88th Siege Battery) and sixty-pounders (26th Heavy Battery) were to fire on villages and strong-points ahead of his column.

<sup>137</sup> Both Captains Cherry and Cooper lost themselves in trying to find battalion headquarters.

<sup>138</sup> Lieut.-Col. R. J. A. Travers, D.S.O. Commanded 26th Bn., 1916/18. Draughtsman; of Bondi, N.S.W.; b. Glen Innes, N.S.W., 21 April, 1888.

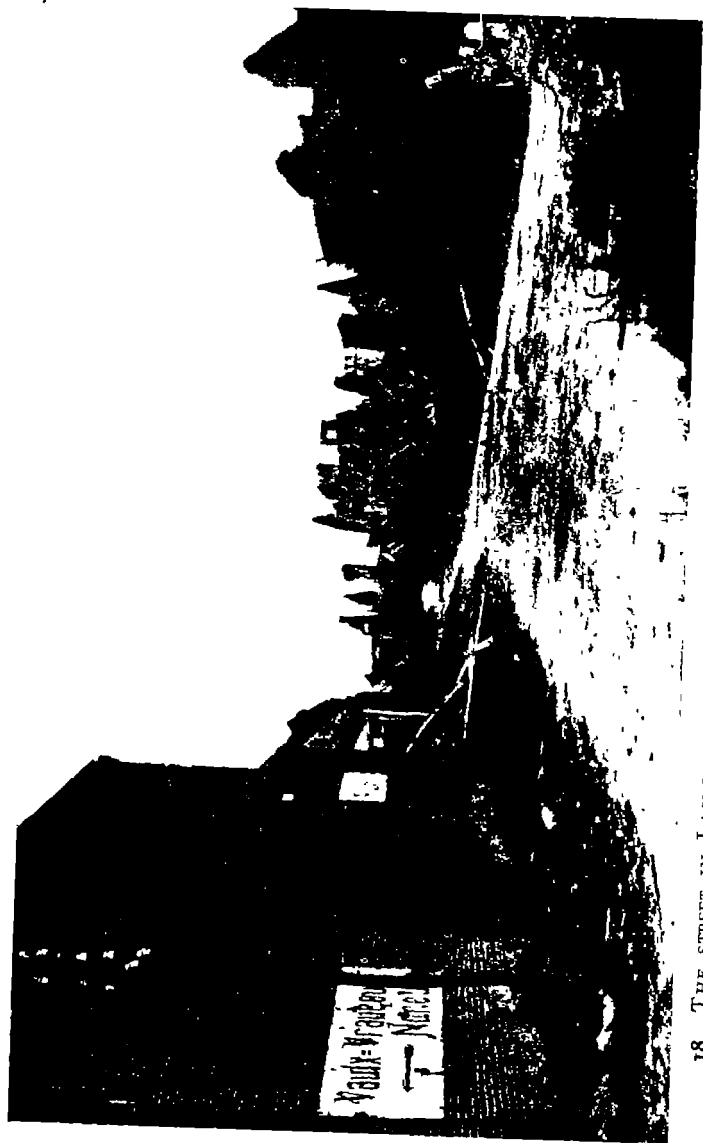


17. A BATTERY OF THE 12TH (ARMY) BRIGADE, A F A, TAKING POSITION SOUTH-WEST OF VAULX-VAUCOURT, 20TH MARCH, 1917, TO REGULATE ITS GUNS UPON LAGNICOURT

Trees on the Ecoeur road in the distance.

*Aust. War Memorial Official Photo No E430.*

*To face p 192*



18. THE STREET IN LAGNICOURT UP WHICH CAPTAIN P H CHERRY'S PARTY ADVANCED ON  
26TH MARCH, 1917

The road-signs were painted by the Germans.

*Aust War Memorial Official Photo No E4581  
Taken on 10th September, 1917*

point, at once hurried two platoons of the "mopping up" company to the vacant flank. But as soon as the barrage fell the commander of the missing company, Captain Cooper, was able to guide himself by its flashes, and with his men punctually reached the left edge of the village. On the other flank of the 26th, however, more serious miscarriage occurred. The 15th Brigade's left battalion was not in touch with the 26th at the starting point, nor could it be seen. The two flanks, which were to advance together, had arranged for close co-operation throughout the assault. The right company commander of the 26th reported the situation and hastily strung out part of his second wave along the empty position to his right.

In spite of these difficulties and of the comparative thinness of the artillery barrage,<sup>139</sup> the attack by the 7th Brigade went almost precisely as planned. The right company of the 26th under Lieutenant Lloyd, when passing the south of the village, was suddenly dazzled by a searchlight turned full upon it from a German outpost<sup>140</sup> south of the town. Thrown into brilliant light, the troops hesitated and halted, but a Lewis gunner of the company turned his gun upon it, firing from the hip. The light was almost instantly cut off,<sup>141</sup> and within half-a-minute of the stoppage the advance continued. Few Germans were met, and Lloyd duly closed round the north-east of the village. Captain Cooper's company, mixed with half the reserve company, similarly made its way round the western side, though losing some men by sniping shots as it swept past. Lagnicourt was thus quickly enclosed, but the centre company, which, under Captain Cherry, was to sweep through the village itself, did not appear. Lieutenant Stapleton of the right company, on reaching the far side of the place, captured several Germans, including a cripple<sup>142</sup> serving in the medical corps, who, when questioned, said that the village was held by 300 to 400 men.<sup>143</sup> As only 450 were actually attacking

<sup>139</sup> This was of course due to the comparative slowness of the artillery force. The shell-bursts of the heavy artillery appeared to predominate.

<sup>140</sup> About 300 yards south of the village on the Lagnicourt-Morchies road. A German barbed-wire fence was also encountered, but did not stop the advance.

<sup>141</sup> The operator may have been killed, for a German was afterwards found dead beside the searchlight; there was a bullet hole through its tripod.

<sup>142</sup> The fact that this cripple, with one foot several inches shorter than the other, should have been recruited impressed those who saw him with the difficulty existing in Germany of maintaining her army at strength.

<sup>143</sup> The true number was probably 250, including the posts on its flanks.

it, the line of Australian posts beyond it waited with some anxiety for the appearance of Cherry's party. They knew it was fighting its way through, for Germans, singly or in twos and threes, constantly came breaking out of the town and were captured or shot down.<sup>144</sup>

Captain Cherry had met with tough resistance. He had advanced with his company in two divisions, himself leading the right along the Beugny road into the south-west corner of Lagnicourt, while Lieutenant Hamilton,<sup>145</sup> moving on the left of the road, attacked the hedges on the western outskirts. They were to meet in the small open space in the centre of the village. As they approached the village Hamilton's platoons received, from the orchard hedges, fifty yards in front of them, the full effect of the defending machine-guns. Many men fell, but Hamilton, who was one of the first to be hit, shouted to Lieutenant Bieske,<sup>146</sup> who was with the party, to take charge. Bieske accordingly led the men forward again, but the movement was at once fired on by a machine-gun, and only Bieske and five men reached the German trench behind the nearest hedge. The Germans fled from it, but from the defences of the hedges to the left a machine-gun was still firing. Bieske and his small party made their way to its flank and bombed it out of the trench without further loss.

Meanwhile Captain Cherry, moving up the road into the village, was fired at from the first house, a large farm built round a courtyard. The Germans, whose breakfast was unfinished, were firing from windows and doors, and for a few minutes the Australians were checked. Then Cherry's bombers rushed both gates of the court, and a Lewis gunner, Private Nutt,<sup>147</sup> firing his gun from the hip, reached the door of the barn and hosed the interior with bullets.

After clearing this farm Cherry moved on up the main street of the village, a straggling road of greasy, putty-coloured

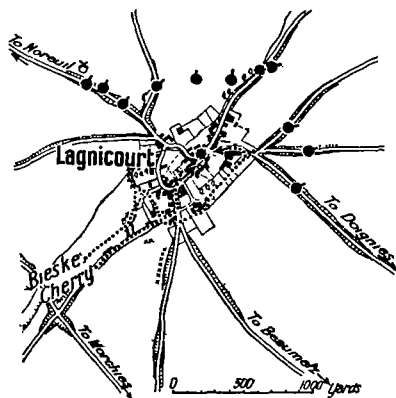
<sup>144</sup> One of those so shot, while trying to escape by running along the road to Quéant, was found to be an officer, Captain Rudolf Guesse. It is believed that he was the commandant of the garrison in this sector. A German signaller carrying the wireless apparatus was captured. A "listening" plant—for overhearing telephone conversations—was also captured.

<sup>145</sup> Lieut W. F. J. Hamilton, M.C.; 26th Bn. Surveyor; of Yeronga, Q'land, b. Isleworth, London, 5 Aug., 1891.

<sup>146</sup> Lieut H. H. Bieske, 26th Bn. Miner; of Ballarat, Vic., and Mount Morgan, Q'land, b. Geelong, Vic., 28 Nov., 1890.

<sup>147</sup> Cpl C. H. Nutt, M.M. (No. 4488; 26th Bn.). Labourer; of Marceba, Q'land; b. England, 1892.

mud, bordered with farmers' houses and barns. He was at once shot at from some stables but headed straight into the stable yard, whereupon the Germans there surrendered. Cherry's Lewis gunners carried their weapons slung, and fired as they went; the barrel-casings became so hot that they could only be aimed by holding the slings. As the party approached the central space of the village, it was found that this now consisted of a great chalk crater<sup>148</sup> blown at the cross-roads and stoutly defended by Germans who fired from its rim. The only approaches were up the streets which were commanded both from the crater-rim and from the loop-holed houses beyond. Lieutenant Corner,<sup>149</sup> who had gone ahead, was killed a few yards from its rim. Cherry was checked, and at first decided that trench-mortars must be brought up before he could successfully rush the crater. He accordingly sent for them, but afterwards, chafing at the necessary delay, decided to make the attempt under cover of Lewis gun fire and bombardment with rifle-grenades.



The rush succeeded; but Cherry was astonished to find, lying at the bottom of the crater, Lieutenant Bieske with a broken leg. Cherry's first thought was that it must have been Bieske's party against whom he had been fighting. It turned out, however, that Bieske, entering the village and being unable to find Cherry, had brought his five men across the village to its eastern outskirts. There, intending to join up with Lloyd, he made towards a sound of voices and ran into a big German officer, whom he captured. Germans began to bolt away from all sides, and, in the excitement of following them, Bieske forgot his prisoner, who suddenly grappled with him. The German, though much heavier, was flabby and faltered. "I

<sup>148</sup> See Vol. XII, plate 306.

<sup>149</sup> Lieut F. W. Corner, 26th Bn. Farmer; of Mosman, N.S.W., b. South Shields, Eng., 19 Sept., 1894. Killed in action, 26 March, 1917.

whipped a 'flying mare' on him," said Bieske afterwards, and as soon as the German fell he was shot by another of the party. In the dim light figures were now seen ahead. To make sure that they were Australians. Bieske went on to a corner of the road, and immediately found himself facing from their left rear the Germans in the crater who were opposing Cherry. Being entirely without cover, he rushed at them with his revolver and, just as their rifles flashed, leapt clean over their heads and, with a shattered ankle, rolled to the bottom of the crater.<sup>150</sup> This unexpected attack, proving that there were Australians in rear of them, caused the Germans to hesitate. They left the crater, apparently to reconnoitre, but returned to it only to be overwhelmed by a charge of Cherry's men, and bayoneted.<sup>151</sup>

At 6.30 the Australians digging at the line of posts beyond the village raised a cheer as they saw Cherry's company emerging from the buildings to join them. After still another stiff fight with Germans in dugouts by the roadside he had forced his way through. His orders were to fall back at this stage into reserve, but, conceiving that the Germans had not retired far and were preparing to counter-attack, he took the responsibility of retaining his troops out in front to strengthen the right company (Lloyd's) and especially its right-hand post in the Doignies road, where no touch had yet been obtained with the 5th Division.

The 27th Battalion had lined up on the same road as the 26th, and had hurried to its objective. A few Germans were met in the sunken road between Lagnicourt and Noreuil, but were killed or dispersed by Captain Friedrichs,<sup>152</sup> who with his bombers enthusiastically led the right company along the

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<sup>150</sup> Bieske's wound was dressed by a German medical orderly, who, with some of Bieske's men, at Major Robinson's orders put him on a door and carried him to the rear. On the way they were all hit by a shell, by which three of them lost their legs.

<sup>151</sup> During this stage Col. Travers received from Cherry three messages, which are quoted in one record as follows.

- (1) "Held up by strong point. Have you any Stokes?"
- (2) (half-an-hour later) "Can't wait for Stokes; having a 'go' at it; will report result later."
- (3) "Got them with Lewis guns and rifle bombs from the flanks. The lot killed. Damned good."

Cherry had no anxiety as to the other companies—he felt certain of finding them in position.

<sup>152</sup> Major K. A. R. Friedrichs, 27th Bn. Clerk, of Adelaide; b. Point Pass, S. Aust., 19 Feb., 1891. Killed in action, 21 April, 1918.



Lagnicourt side of the ridge.<sup>153</sup> A number of Germans hurrying up the road ran into this company also, and were captured. A post was thrust far along the ridge, enclosing the stump of Lagnicourt mill. Captain Bice's<sup>154</sup> company occupied part of the Lagnicourt-Noreuil road farther to the left. Here, observing that this flank had closed in to the right as it advanced, Lieutenant Davies placed a post 200 yards farther down the road, overlooking Noreuil. The flank was joined to the old front line by Lieutenant Beddome's<sup>155</sup> company stringing along the crest to the left rear. On the right touch was gained with the 26th, but on the extreme left the 25th was prevented by machine-guns in Noreuil from swinging up its right.

About 7.30, after the first few messages telling of the success of the 27th, came others to the effect that Germans, evidently from Noreuil, were appearing on the left of the troops in the Lagnicourt-Noreuil road. Keen sniping came from Noreuil, and under cover of it the Germans were evidently building up a line just divided by the crest from that of the 27th. Their line, only fifty yards away at some points, might make its rush attack at any moment, and the danger was great, for many of the rifles of the South Australians were choked with mud.<sup>156</sup> A fair number of men were being hit from Noreuil, and four of the Lewis guns on the ridge were reported to have been destroyed.

Lieutenant-Colonel Slane<sup>157</sup> of the 27th was, however, well informed of the situation by each of his company commanders, and about 8 o'clock he telephoned<sup>158</sup> the information to the 12th Battery (Major St. Clair<sup>159</sup>). The battery, which had been trying to keep down the snipers in Noreuil, now turned

<sup>153</sup> The subaltern leaders of the first wave of the 27th were Lieutenants W. L. Davies and A. B. Durdin; of its second wave, Lieutenants G. Ward and A. R. Burton. (Davies belonged to Kent Town, S. Aust.; Durdin to Forresterville, S. Aust.; Ward to Glenaroua, Vic.; Burton to Nadda, S. Aust.)

<sup>154</sup> Lieut.-Col. P. G. Bice, V.D.; 27th Bn. Civil servant; of Prospect, S. Aust.; b. Semaphore, S. Aust., 6 Oct., 1893.

<sup>155</sup> Capt. J. W. K. Beddome, 27th Bn. Clerk; of Lockleys, S. Aust.; b. Blinman, S. Aust., 9 Nov., 1892.

<sup>156</sup> According to one report, at the post near the windmill every weapon was clogged except one captured Mauser.

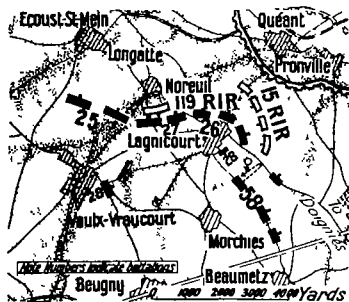
<sup>157</sup> Col. J. C. F. Slane, D.S.O., V.D. Commanded 27th Bn., 1916/17. Commercial traveller; of North Adelaide, S. Aust.; b. 12 Sept., 1873.

<sup>158</sup> He had a direct line of telephone to this battery.

<sup>159</sup> Brig. W. H. St. Clair, D.S.O., V.D. Commanded 12th Battery, A.F.A., 1917/18. Salesman; of Kew and Malvern, Vic.; b. Kew, 5 June, 1892.

its fire in enfilade upon the line of Germans on the open crest. They were also under fire from a machine-gun of the 7th Company on the far left flank.<sup>160</sup> Meanwhile the Germans had made one dangerous movement. An officer had appeared leading an advance against the left in the Lagnicourt-Noreuil road. When he was shot, the heart went out of the counter-attack. Under the covering fire of St. Clair's battery, the Australian flank crept forward at some points over the crest, so that it could fire towards Noreuil. There, under a scattered shelling, it held on throughout the day, and the Germans gradually withdrew.<sup>161</sup>

The 26th Battalion around Lagnicourt was not seriously affected by this early counter-attack; but, about 9 o'clock, the enemy began to shell the village more heavily, and continued till 10.30. Meanwhile the troops in front of the village could see in the distance, near Pronville, Germans estimated at 1,000 strong, lining up in small groups near the foremost entanglements of the Hindenburg Line. Their officers appeared to be showing them the ground over which they were to attack. Word was sent to Colonel Travers,<sup>162</sup> who telephoned the information to his supporting battery, the 14th (Major Fanning<sup>163</sup>). But the original message had taken forty minutes to arrive, and, when the place was shelled, the Germans had already left it. Soon afterwards, a message arrived from Cherry saying that the enemy was counter-attacking, and asking for artillery support. Travers sent forward the second company of the 28th; its third and fourth companies were afterwards allotted to him, and were sent on towards the front. General Wisdom at 11.30, and again at 12.25, appealed



<sup>160</sup> Two of these guns, under Lieutenant W. Hargrave (of Glen Forrest, W. Aust.), were attached to the 27th Battalion. The second, near the windmill, also fired at the foremost Germans, and was shifted to enfilade them.

<sup>161</sup> They established posts behind felled trees or other barricades farther down the roads leading into Noreuil.

<sup>162</sup> He was at first inclined to believe that the enemy was not more than a company strong, and that the threat was not dangerous.

<sup>163</sup> Lieut.-Col. R. E. Fanning, D.S.O., p.s.c. Commanded 14th Battery, 1916/17. Officer of Aust. Permanent Forces; of Melbourne; b. Melbourne, 15 Nov., 1889.

to his colleague, General Elliott, to attack the enemy's left. Wisdom reported afterwards that the launching of his counter-stroke<sup>164</sup> was delayed by the impression that Elliott's troops held the Doignies road.

Be that as it may, before the later companies of the 28th had arrived, an acute crisis had come and passed. Lloyd's and Cherry's companies of the 26th were disposed in posts at an average distance of 300 yards beyond the northern and eastern outskirts. Most of these posts were dug into the banks of sunken roads radiating from the village, and looked out over fields bare except for thickly sprinkled manure heaps. At some posts men had been set to level the nearer heaps which interfered with their field of fire. But, when the Germans advanced, hidden from many of the Queenslanders by the curve of the hill, and reappeared on a wide front only 300 yards away, these heaps greatly assisted their further progress. On the ridge to the left of Lagnicourt two attached machine-guns under Lieutenant Beggs,<sup>165</sup> opening at 800 yards, completely stopped the counter-attack in that sector; but on the right of Lagnicourt the flank post under Lieutenant Stapleton, 400 yards down the Doignies road, still watching for a sign of the 5th Division,<sup>166</sup> had now to withdraw closer to the village, since a single German sniper establishing himself among the trees farther along the road could have placed it out of action.<sup>167</sup> Working from one manure-heap to another, the Germans steadily approached and began to fire from front and flank into the northern posts, some of which merely lay in the open behind the heaps. The Lewis guns were frequently clogged with mud,<sup>168</sup> and the men, whose hands and cartridges were smeared with clay, could not keep their rifles from choking.

<sup>164</sup> In addition to part of the 28th, he had the 19th Battalion (5th Brigade) in reserve.

<sup>165</sup> Lieut. J. Beggs, 7th M.G. Coy. Sleeper hewer; of Nanga Brook, W. Aust.; b. Kerang, Vic., 17 March, 1886. (One of these guns, however, should, according to the orders from the 26th Battalion, have been on the eastern side of Lagnicourt.)

<sup>166</sup> At one time men were seen farther along the road, and were at first thought to be Australians (which they possibly were). Afterwards it was conjectured that they had been Germans.

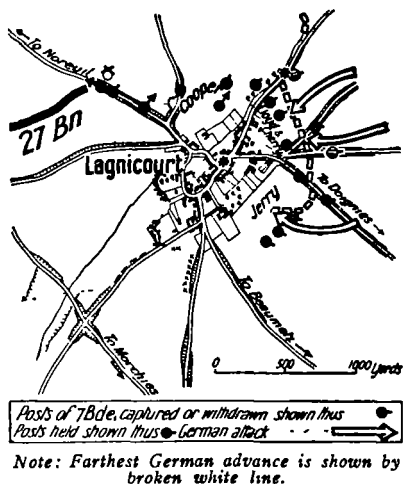
<sup>167</sup> The effect of the heavy German bombardment is said to have been partly averted by the action of Captain Cherry, who, observing that the Germans were firing yellow flares to show their position to their artillery, himself promptly fired some of the same lights, which he had found near by. Whether for this reason or another, the German artillery lengthened its range and shelled the farther part of the village.

<sup>168</sup> At one time seven of these were out of action. In one post a man was kept at work cleaning rifles with a torn-up German blanket.

On top of all else, some of the posts were fired into by supporting batteries on the right, which seemed to be unaware of their position.<sup>169</sup> The jamming of a Lewis gun on the left gave the enemy the opportunity to penetrate between the posts there. Two others, thus outflanked, drew back closer to the village. Lieutenant Humphrys,<sup>170</sup> in charge of a fourth, had sent back to ask if he should withdraw, and had been ordered by Lloyd to hold his position at all costs. This post accordingly held, until Humphrys had been killed, the Lewis gun had jammed, and ammunition had failed, when, with the Germans now on all sides of them, the survivors under Sergeant Hickling surrendered.

Meanwhile, the southern flank of the Germans had crossed the Doignies road, which the 5th Division was to have held, and worked round the right of the Lagnicourt posts. The first reinforcement from the 28th had by then arrived, and a platoon commander, Lieutenant Jerry,<sup>171</sup> had hurriedly stationed four posts among the manure-heaps south-east of the village. But the enemy, still advancing with skill and bringing a machine-gun, practically annihilated these and pressed back the Australian flank to the edge of the village.

To the Australians north and east of Lagnicourt, fighting with their backs against the village, and with the Germans almost touching some of the posts, the situation seemed almost desperate. Cherry and the other officers, after conferring as to a possible withdrawal, decided to hold on, but it seemed



<sup>169</sup> The area of the 5th Division on the right also was, through the same cause, shelled by batteries on the left.

<sup>170</sup> Lieut. T. S. Humphrys, 26th Bn. Clerk; of Cooktown, Q'land; b. Cooktown, 13 Feb., 1891. Killed in action, 26 March, 1917.

<sup>171</sup> Lieut. A. S. Jerry, M.M., 28th Bn. Farmer; of Emu Hill, W. Aust.; b. Barnsley, Yorks, Eng., 26 Dec., 1893. Died of wounds, 26 March, 1917.

likely that the next step must be an attempt to charge back through the encircling enemy. At this stage, however, the enemy's spirit gave way. His troops on the left, within a stone's throw of success, began to fall back, followed by increasing fire from the Australians. The German machine-gunners on the right took shelter in some dead ground, where they were presently captured, together with the gun, by Jerry and a single other survivor of his party. The rest of the German line, in close contact with the Australian posts, ebbed and withdrew over the slope on which the Australian artillery was now laying a scattered barrage. Later in the day a long line of Germans was seen digging 1,000 yards from the Australian posts.

Thus, by outlasting the enemy when both sides were at the limit of their endurance, the Queenslanders had defeated this dangerous attack. The Germans could not have penetrated as they did had the battalion of Elliott's column been in its prearranged position. To the attack by that battalion, the narrative must now turn.

No commander in the A.I.F. was more eager than Elliott to assist to the utmost any force acting on his flank, and on this, as on other occasions, he was anxious to do even more than was asked or expected. On March 21st, as soon as the order for participation by his column was received, he ordered the 60th (Victoria) Battalion to prepare for the attack. Its officers were sent up to reconnoitre the ground, and between them and the 26th Battalion there were arranged plans for exceptionally thorough co-operation. Their flanking companies were to assemble and advance together, and their final posts on the Doignies road were to be in close touch.<sup>172</sup> On the evening of March 24th the 60th stood ready to carry out these arrangements, when the operation was postponed.

At this stage the elaborated plans were dislocated by a simple change—the 58th Battalion was substituted for the 60th. For some reason, difficult to trace, it was not until seventy-five minutes before the assault that this change was known to the commander of the 26th. No mutual arrangements had been made with the 58th, but its two attacking

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<sup>172</sup> The left-hand post of the 60th would be 500 yards from Lagnicourt.

companies duly advanced, independently of the 26th, to their first objective,<sup>173</sup> and then sent forward detachments to form posts on the Doignies road. Neither company, however, met with full success. The right was strongly resisted by enemy posts on that road,<sup>174</sup> and failed to reach it, and the left was fired on by German machine-gunners holding an isolated position in a crater between the left of the 58th and the right of the 26th.<sup>175</sup> The left-flank post was reported to have been established with some difficulty about 600 yards from the flank of the 26th, but the German machine-gun fired at it from the left rear, and, when morning mists cleared and the German counter-attack was seen sweeping from Pronville across the front, this post withdrew. Others farther east fired on the passing Germans, and Elliott, on receiving Wisdom's appeal, placed the 58th Battalion under his command, sent up the 59th with orders to counter-attack the enemy's left, and summoned, for further assistance if required, a battalion from the 8th Brigade. Elliott had arranged that a telephone line should be laid direct between Wisdom's brigade and his, but, for some unknown reason, this was twice disconnected in the signal office of the 7th Brigade, and messages had to travel back through a hierarchy of headquarters before reaching the adjoining brigade. Much time was thus lost. But at this stage the delay made little difference, since even before Wisdom's appeal had been made—much more before any action by Elliott resulted—the German attack had been driven off.<sup>176</sup> That

<sup>173</sup> The Lagnicourt-Beaumetz road.

<sup>174</sup> The main *point d'appui* between Louverval and Lagnicourt, held by one of the four companies of the III/91st R.I.R. and three machine-guns, lay on this part of the road.

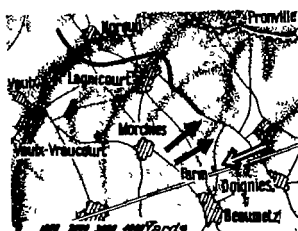
<sup>175</sup> On a captured map, three machine-guns are marked near this point.

<sup>176</sup> The faulty *liaison* during the counter-attack was the occasion of a sharp difference between Wisdom and Elliott. Wisdom is said to have reported that the number of the prisoners would have been greater if he could have induced Elliott to deliver a prompt counterstroke against the left of the counter-attacking Germans. Elliott, on the other hand, pointed out that he had caused the telephone to be laid from the 58th to the 26th Battalion, "but had difficulty in preserving communication owing to lack of interest at the 2nd Division end. On two occasions linesmen found the line had been disconnected from the switchboard and dropped. The 15th Brigade sent a *liaison* officer to the 26th Battalion, but no *liaison* officer was supplied in return." Elliott also, at 10.20, placed the 58th Battalion under Wisdom's control. Thus the faulty *liaison* during the battle was clearly not due to any fault of Elliott.

These claims and counter-claims were reported to General Gough when he visited the front area, but their importance is merely academic, since the course of the action was not in fact affected by these events. Elliott throughout wrongly believed that his 58th Battalion was on its objective, and had so informed Wisdom. Wisdom, for his part, did not learn of the German counter-attack until about the time when it was defeated. Consequently, as so often happened, the appeal for help and the energetic measures taken in answer to it all occurred too late to affect the operation.

afternoon the 58th Battalion seized the Doignies road, capturing on the left the troublesome German machine-gun and its crew.<sup>177</sup>

At about 9.30 that night the Germans bombarded the road, and the southernmost detachment of the 58th was driven in. At the same time the front post on the Cambrai road, in the farmhouse captured by the 57th,<sup>178</sup> was so heavily shelled that twelve of its garrison of forty were killed or wounded, and the remainder retired. The shelling here preceded a raid by the enemy. Captain McDonald<sup>179</sup> of the 59th, who had been sent up with his company during the counter-attack on Lagnicourt, happened to be on his way back to Beugny, when this news reached him. On his own initiative, he at once returned to the front and reoccupied the farm. At dusk on the 27th a party of the 58th, advancing partly through Captain Cherry's position and partly across the open to the Doignies road, surprised and captured a post which the enemy had established there also.<sup>180</sup>



Black arrows—58th Battalion's attack in the afternoon.

White arrow—German raid at 9.30 p.m.

The action at Lagnicourt, at a cost of 377 casualties to the Australians, brought the Fifth Army at one point through the screen of villages and close to the Hindenburg Line. The enemy did not renew his attempt to capture the village, but heavily shelled the buildings, the surrounding roads, and the post of the 27th near the windmill. By one shell, bursting in a sunken road east of the village, Captain Cherry,<sup>181</sup> Lieutenant Jerry, and other officers were killed.<sup>182</sup>

<sup>177</sup> Three men of the 94th R.I.R. With them were seven men of the 91st R.I.R. who had taken refuge in the crater on the retirement of the German counter-attack.

<sup>178</sup> See p. 171.

<sup>179</sup> Capt. K. G. McDonald, M.C.; 59th Bn. Bank manager; of Hamilton, Vic.; b. Hamilton, 25 Sept., 1885.

<sup>180</sup> The 58th captured there a searchlight and machine-gun.

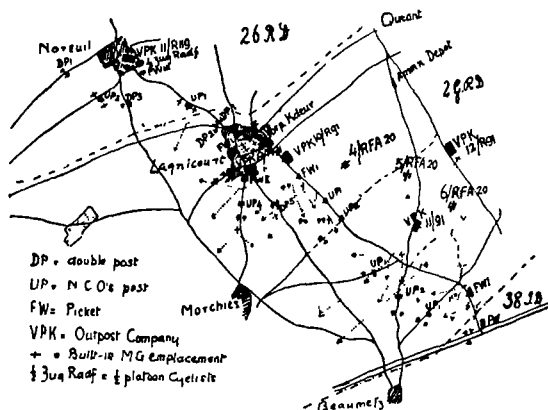
<sup>181</sup> Cherry's work on this day was recognised by the award of the Victoria Cross.

<sup>182</sup> In the 28th Battalion in this fight there were also killed Lieutenants W. E. S. Cook (of Perth, W. Aust.), G. Eyre Powell (of Walebing, W. Aust.), and A. H. Ties (of Rockhampton, Q'land); in the 58th, Lieutenant E. R. Pearson (of Middle Park, Vic.). The 26th Battalion casualties were 8 officers and 134 others; 27th Battalion, 43 others; 28th, 6 officers and 76 others. The 7th Brigade thus lost 14 officers and 253 others. In the 15th Brigade the loss was 5 officers and 105 men. The total loss was therefore 19 officers and 358 others.

It is now known that on March 23, in consequence of the order that the rear-guard line was "after all" to be held, the 2nd Guard Reserve Division decided to attach all three machine-gun companies and the light trench-mortars of the 91st R.I.R. to its rear-guard battalion (III/91st R.I.R.), which held Lagnicourt and the line south-east of it. It was also decided to remodel the defences of Lagnicourt, abandoning the existing trenches and secretly fortifying positions 150 yards farther back in the houses of the village. Wire obstacles were to be placed unobtrusively, and a *point d'appui* was also to be constructed between Lagnicourt and Louverval (in front of Elliott's column). Although this line was now to be held for some time, Lagnicourt contained no deep dugouts. They were accordingly to be at once begun, and in the meantime, in order to cause the British artillery to scatter its shells rather than concentrate them, the old trenches and outpost positions were to be maintained as dummy defences, and at night parties were to be sent out to dig ostentatiously other works.<sup>183</sup>

On the morning of the action the III/91st R.I.R. had two companies facing the 7th Australian Brigade, one facing the 58th Battalion, and one in reserve.

These were supported by the three machine-gun companies and the trench-mortars of the regiment, and by three advanced batteries of field artillery, besides heavier guns firing at long range from just behind the Hindenburg Line. The headquarters of the III/91st R.I.R. were in the village. A map captured in Lagnicourt indicates that the *point d'appui* between Lagnicourt and Louverval lay



Copy of a captured German map of the Lagnicourt defences. (Four machine-guns are shown in reserve in Lagnicourt.)

opposite the right company of the 58th Australian Battalion, and that this battalion, which had to advance without special barrage, was confronted by many more machine-guns than the troops attacking Lagnicourt itself, an advance from this flank having probably been expected.<sup>184</sup> The counter-attack organised after the loss of the village was preceded by several hours' shelling by the artillery of the 2nd Guard Reserve Division, supported by that of the 26th Reserve Division on the north and the 38th Division on the south. For the assault, the III/91st R.I.R. was reinforced by the I/15th R.I.R. (of the 2nd Guard Reserve Division), which counter-attacked from Pronville.

<sup>183</sup> It was evidently one of these parties which was discovered by Sgt. Hickling of the 26th (see p. 191).

<sup>184</sup> According to the map, nine or ten machine-guns could bear on the 58th, and only two or three on the 26th Battalion.



The outpost battalion of the 119th Regiment (26th Reserve Division) co-operated by an advance from Noreuil. The German staff incorrectly believed that their troops retook the northern part of Lagnicourt as well as the high ground near the windmill; the lack of further success was attributed to the fire of the Australian machine-guns on that ridge.

For the resistance to the left flank of the Australian attack, the III/119th R.I.R. was responsible. The advanced posts of the 10th company, then garrisoning Noreuil,<sup>185</sup> were driven back on their picquet, which at once built up a line of riflemen to protect the flank. Two more companies were brought up, but it was found impossible to retake the posts. The commander of the XIV Reserve Corps, General von Moser (whose sector confronted the 2nd Australian Division), notes in his diary that some pressure was put upon him to recapture Lagnicourt by a strong reinforcement of infantry and artillery. He firmly objected, holding that it was not part of his duty "to make further sacrifices for the maintenance of ground *in front of* the Siegfried (Hindenburg) Line." Nevertheless he states that his first anxieties as corps commander (he had taken command on March 18) began from that day.

The night before the capture of Lagnicourt was marked by the blowing up of the town hall of Bapaume by a mine placed there by the Germans and operated by a chemical fuse,<sup>186</sup> set more than eight days before. When first Bapaume was entered, the cellars of this building had been searched, and a mine had been found and removed.<sup>187</sup> The truth—that a hidden mine had been left as a trap, in the hopes that a division would place its headquarters there<sup>188</sup>—had not been suspected. No high staff had occupied the place, but about thirty men, including those employed at the coffee stall of the Australian Comforts Fund,<sup>189</sup> and two visiting French deputies, Captain R. Briquet and M. Albert Taillandier, were sleeping there when the explosion occurred, bringing down the tower and walls in a deluge of shattered masonry. The two deputies and the Comforts Fund men were killed, but large fatigue parties, digging furiously throughout that night and the next day, rescued alive six of

<sup>185</sup> The 3rd Machine-Gun Company of the 119th R.I.R. (6 guns) was in course of relief by the 1st, and the guns of both were consequently available.

<sup>186</sup> A steel wire was suspended in acid. The acid, eating through it, released a spring operating a striker, and thus fired the mine.

<sup>187</sup> A German prisoner had said that it was mined (*see p. 87*).

<sup>188</sup> Probably because it was too obvious a target for the long-range gun which still shelled the town.

<sup>189</sup> *See Vol. XII, plate 275.* Others included were three officers of the 13th Field Company, seven members of the 13th Light Horse Regiment engaged in traffic control, and nine men of the 20th Battalion.

the others.<sup>190</sup> A German wireless operator captured in Lagnicourt said that he had just received instructions to keep his eyes open for any sign of explosion in the direction of Bapaume. He added that similar mines had been laid elsewhere. Before this warning could be circulated, at 12.37 p.m. on March 26th, the luxurious dugout system on the edge of Bapaume, in which Gellibrand and Wisdom had in turn placed their headquarters, was entirely destroyed by a similar mine, two signal clerks and the records of the 7th Brigade being buried. Most of the 7th Brigade staff had fortunately advanced to Vaulx-Vraucourt.<sup>191</sup> Orders were given that dugouts or houses left intact by the enemy must be avoided both by staffs and by troops.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> The Comforts Fund men, being under the tower, were killed instantly. The officers of the 13th Field Company and men of the 13th Light Horse, imprisoned in different cellars, were confident they would be dug out, and merely "turned in" to sleep until rescued. Among the units which supplied large digging parties were the 13th Field Company, and 18th, 22nd, and 30th Battalions.

<sup>191</sup> Lieut. N. E. W. Waraker (of Brisbane; killed in action on 22 Sept., 1917), bombing officer of the 7th Brigade, was blown from the dugout entrance, unharmed. Digging parties, working desperately day and night, were unable to save the signallers or to recover the records. The current diary of the Official War Correspondent, on which this work is partly based, was found during the digging.

<sup>192</sup> For some of the numerous traps afterwards found, see p. 247, footnote 125. Not many Australians were caught by them. At Vaulx-Vraucourt a party of the 2nd Battalion, billeted in a house, was poking a stick up the chimney on the chance of discovering hidden valuables, when a packet of high explosive fell on to the hearth. It had obviously been placed there to explode if a fire was lighted. The fairly widespread indignation among the troops at the enemy's supposed unfairness in leaving behind these traps was difficult to understand, inasmuch as the Australians themselves had left at Anzac many similar surprises for the Turks—who, in their turn, were strangely indignant. The devices were in some cases unnecessarily cruel, but they effected a legitimate object—that of hampering the enemy's movements by impressing him with the necessity for caution.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE TAKING OF THE OUTPOST VILLAGES

Not only the Fifth British Army, but also the right of the Third which was to take part in the great Arras offensive, were still separated from the Hindenburg Line by a chain of villages which had been broken only at one point—Lagnicourt. The date for the British offensive had now been settled—April 8th—and Haig was anxious lest the Third Army should be late in securing the “jumping-off” positions on its right. Gough also was eager to seize the line of villages which prevented him from preparing an assault upon the Hindenburg Line. He stated that, if the subordinate staffs had shown more energy in getting forward their heavy artillery, the villages would have been taken before March 23rd. The part of the artillery allocated for that purpose was now up, and when, on March 29th, a third attempt to seize Croisilles and Ecoust, made by the 7th British Division after bombardment by heavy howitzers, had failed, the divisional commander was relieved of his position<sup>1</sup> and a new attack organised for April 1st.

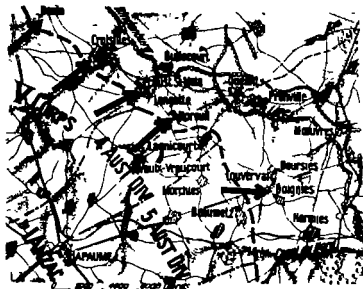
It was decided that the Fifth Army and the right of the Third should attack on the same day the whole string of villages, with the exception of the southernmost, Hermies: on the Third Army's front two divisions<sup>2</sup> of the VII Corps would advance to beyond Henin; on the Fifth Army's front the 7th Division (V Corps) would seize Croisilles and Ecoust-Longatte, and next to it the left column of the I Anzac Corps would take Noreuil.<sup>3</sup> The next village in the chain, Lagnicourt, had already been captured, but south of it

<sup>1</sup> It is probable that the repulse was not due to lack of energy, but to failure of the higher staff to recognise the difficulty. At Longatte the 2nd Battalion, Gordon Highlanders (20th Brigade), had been stopped by strong German machine-gun fire. At Croisilles the attack by the 91st Brigade had made some progress. The I Anzac heavy artillery and the field artillery of the 2nd Australian Division had assisted by firing upon Noreuil. The relieved commander, Major-General G. de S. Barrow, afterwards served with distinction in Palestine.

<sup>2</sup> The 21st and 30th.

<sup>3</sup> See Vol. XII, plate 307.

the right Anzac column would seize Louverval<sup>4</sup> and Doignies.<sup>5</sup> On this flank a further string of villages<sup>6</sup> would still remain to be taken before the Hindenburg Line was reached, but the task there was somewhat less urgent, since no serious operations against the Hindenburg Line in the neighbourhood were projected.



Arrows show projected attacks.

After the capture of Lagnicourt the 2nd Australian Division was relieved by the 4th, which came in fresh from a month's rest and training. The two artillery brigades of the 2nd, however, and the 12th (Army) Brigade of Australian Field Artillery, remained in the line, the artillery of the 4th Division not being yet brought up.<sup>7</sup> The forces confronting the German rear-guards were now advanced guards only in name, and this term ceased to be applied after April 2nd, on which date the main defensive line of the corps was advanced from near Bapaume to the old German R.III line, and the front of the advanced brigades now became known as the "advanced line of resistance." The troops in the left sector (previously known as the "left column") were now supported by eight batteries of 18-pounders and two of 4.5-inch howitzers, as well as three siege batteries and two of 60-pounder guns; and these siege batteries, besides shooting on Noreuil and other villages, had by March 29th fired 120 6-inch shells into the salient of the Hindenburg Line around the village of Bullecourt—the only part of that line within range. There was thus sufficient artillery available for the infantry attacking Noreuil to be protected, as at Lagnicourt, by a weak barrage.

The attack on Noreuil would be undertaken by the 13th Australian Infantry Brigade, which had relieved the 7th

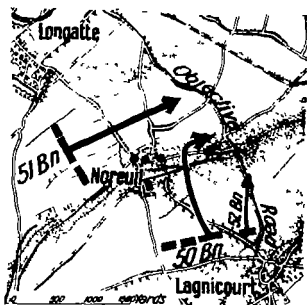
<sup>4</sup> See Vol. XII, plate 301.

<sup>5</sup> See Vol. XII, plate 302.

<sup>6</sup> Boursies, Demicourt, and Hermies. Photographs of Hermies and Boursies are given in Vol. XII (plates 303, 304).

<sup>7</sup> The artillery was still being reorganised under the scheme mentioned on pp 17-18, some of the extra howitzer batteries from England joining the reorganised brigades at this juncture.

Brigade at Lagnicourt and Vaulx-Vraucourt. Its commander, Brigadier-General Glasgow, decided to turn the capture of Lagnicourt to advantage by attacking Noreuil from the south with the 50th (South Australia) Battalion, while the 51st (Western Australia) drove past it on the north. The inner flanks of the two battalions would rest on two converging roads, and the 50th, on reaching the village, would swing round and advance on the flank of the 51st to a line 800 to 1,000 yards east of the village—the Lagnicourt-Bullecourt road afforded a convenient objective. The advance would be a long one since the 51st Battalion had also to go 700 yards, and the 50th 1,000, before reaching Noreuil; but the field artillery would first muffle the German posts around the village, and then advance its barrage so as to keep ahead of the troops. On the barrage reaching the Bullecourt road, forty minutes from the start, it would remain there for twenty minutes while the troops lay in front of the road preparing for the final assault. The barrage would then again advance and the road would be seized.



It was recognised that this plan entailed difficulties. The 50th Battalion had an excellent position for concentration on the ridge between Lagnicourt and Noreuil, overlooking Noreuil from the south; but several advanced posts on the sunken roads leading down into the village would have to be taken before the outskirts were reached. A post on the Lagnicourt road on the extreme right was to be seized by the flanking battalion, the 52nd (Western Australia and Tasmania). Two others behind barricades in front of the 50th would be bombarded by Stokes mortars, and a third on the left attacked by a platoon of bombers. The right company, which would direct itself east of the village, must, on reaching a field-railway cutting in the valley, wheel to the right and wait for the others to come up and continue the advance eastward. The centre and left companies would cross the

railway and road, enter the village, and then, after fighting through it to the right, emerge from the eastern end and join the waiting company. To strengthen them for the fighting in the village, the centre and left companies were drawn up in two waves, with sixty "moppers-up" following immediately behind to clear the dugouts and houses. The right company was in one wave, spread out over a front nearly equal to that of the other two,<sup>8</sup> but with a platoon of the reserve company supporting it. The formation of the 51st Battalion was somewhat similar, its right company, which would brush through the outskirts of the village, being drawn up in two waves, its other two companies in one.<sup>9</sup> The 51st would advance along the spur between Noreuil and Longatte, its left in the shallow depression south-east of Longatte, in touch with the 2nd Gordon Highlanders. The Gordons were to seize Longatte, and the 8th and 9th Devons Ecooust, farther north. The attack on all the villages from Noreuil leftwards would be launched at 5.15 a.m.—the hour when dark began to change towards daylight; but the operation by the right column of I Anzac against Doignies and Louveral could be begun at any hour suitable to the local commanders. The date was eventually postponed until April 2nd.

The operations were still in open country, clear of all fortifications except the wire-entanglements and trenches bent around the outskirts of the villages, a few entrenched strong posts between the villages, and a sprinkling of sentry posts dug in advance of the main posts. Most of the posts in the open were on the roads which, as in all this part of France, were largely sunken, often, it is said, through the raising of parts of the neighbouring fields through continual ploughing—a process which also accounted for the existence of steep banks between many of the fields on the hillsides, giving to the slopes an appearance of having here and there been artificially terraced. The British in their advance and the German rear-guards in withdrawing largely bivouacked in these roads, since the banks, whether three feet or a dozen feet in depth, not only gave protection against fire, except in enfilade, but could be quickly scooped into little one-man

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<sup>8</sup> The left and centre companies occupied 250 yards, the right 400.

<sup>9</sup> Each wave consisted of two lines.

niches in which men lived with slight cover from the weather, but fairly safe against shell-fire. Thus a company or more could quickly settle itself into a series of small niches<sup>10</sup> on a road-bank. At important posts the Germans, when time allowed, tunnelled deep dugouts in the road-banks, and one or more of these were afterwards found by the Australians in most of the sunken roads at this time held by the enemy about Noreuil. The German posts in front of that village had been located by patrols, and for two nights the village had been shelled and its approaches kept under intermittent fire of artillery and machine-guns, to wear down the defenders.

April 1st had been showery, but the night was frosty, the sky clear, and illuminated after midnight by a half-moon.

**The attack  
on Noreuil**

About 2.30 the two Australian battalions took up their widely separated positions, which the scouts had marked since midnight with white tapes; but in the 51st perplexity was caused by the discovery that the Gordon Highlanders, who should have been on the left flank, were assembling in rear of the battalion. It was afterwards found that, by some mistake, they had laid their tape partly behind that of the 51st and facing not Longatte, but Noreuil.<sup>11</sup> The error could not be corrected before the troops started, and, when at 5.15 the barrage fell, the two battalions advanced together.

The barrage was not thick, each field-gun having to cover sixty yards of the front in the earlier phases, although the extent narrowed to thirty-five yards at the final objective. The 51st, advancing, met with machine-gun fire from left, right, and the sunken Noreuil-Longatte road ahead. After some eighty men had fallen, the line threw itself down in front of that road, but a young officer, Lieutenant Earl,<sup>12</sup> crawled forward with a few men on the right and, entering the road, crept along its bank and, after Earl had shot with his revolver the crew of the nearest machine-gun, suppressed two guns farther along it. The road was at once stormed

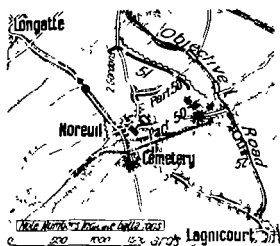
<sup>10</sup> The Germans called them "rabbit holes," "*caninchenlochen*"

<sup>11</sup> Before the advance men of the Gordon Highlanders were mixed with the left and right companies of the 51st. Major R. Christie (of Bundaberg, Q'land) immediately afterwards, endeavouring to ascertain the cause of this, found the tape laid as described

<sup>12</sup> Capt. R. Earl, M.C.; 51st Bn. Farmer; of Bunbury, W. Aust.; b Ourimbah. N.S.W.; 9 Nov., 1894.

and a number of the enemy were killed or captured there. As Longatte had not been taken, a post was formed in this road where it dipped towards that village, and the rest of the line then advanced along the green open spur, the right flank meeting some of the 50th and working with them through the northern outskirts of Noreuil. The opposition there was slight, and the 51st was soon beyond the village. Here, at the junction of two deeply sunken roads, deep dugouts were found and a few prisoners taken.

The Bullecourt road was 700 yards farther on. The barrage still lay on it when the 51st approached, but 250 yards short of it the troops, to their surprise, came upon a long new empty trench, well dug, though rather shallow. It had not been reported by infantry patrols or by aircraft, and the intelligence staff was unaware of its existence. On the right it converged towards the objective road until they almost met near the bottom of the Noreuil valley. Some of the troops went on and entered the road, in which there were enemy troops. But, as fire was now coming from the right rear, near Noreuil, where two German machine-guns were chattering, the officers of the 51st decided to hold their men in the trench. Their flanks appeared to be safe, for they found officers and men of the 50th in the same trench on their right, and part of the 2nd Gordon Highlanders on their left. Yet the fire coming from Noreuil and from the valley showed that that village, like Longatte, had not yet been "mopped up." Part of the 50th Battalion's attack had evidently not yet succeeded, and it was presently ascertained that the portion of that battalion adjoining the right of the 51st, like the Highlanders on the left, was out of touch with the other parts of its unit.

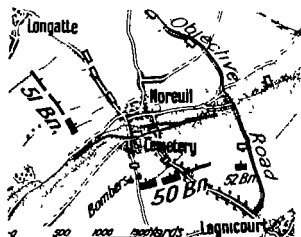


The 50th had indeed met with extraordinary difficulties. As it advanced down the hill towards Noreuil,<sup>13</sup> the barrage, which was supposed to muffle the village in front of it, proved much too thin to suppress the garrison. The first German

<sup>13</sup> See Vol. XII, plate 307.



posts, behind barricades on the sunken roads, leading down to the village, were quickly passed, having been duly subdued by the Stokes mortars and bombers,<sup>14</sup> but at the German cemetery, just south of the western corner of the village, a platoon of the enemy with a machine-gun, protected by a barricade, a steep bank, and some wire, enfiladed the advance and caused many casualties. Lieutenants Jose<sup>15</sup> and Bidstrup<sup>16</sup>—the latter after emptying his revolver into the Germans—were killed, and Lieutenant Hoggarth—the first Australian to reach Mouquet Farm—mortally wounded. "Go on! go on!" he shouted to some of his men who turned to attend him. Farther to the right the advance had also been for a moment checked by a platoon of the enemy posted behind a second barricade on the Noreuil-Lagnicourt road. A gap had opened between the right and centre companies. The Stokes mortars, which had been firing at the place, had not reduced it, and it looked as if the right company might have to leave these Germans unsubdued in its rear. Seeing this, Sergeant Wilson,<sup>17</sup> commanding the last wave of the centre company, detached his bombers to assist and to follow on afterwards. One of them, a Danish private named Jensen,<sup>18</sup> getting a mate<sup>19</sup> to cover him by sniping at the defending machine-gunners, rushed up to the position and, flinging in a bomb and holding up two others, bluffed more than forty Germans to surrender to him.<sup>20</sup>



<sup>14</sup> The mortars pouring in swiftly their high-explosive bombs shattered the defenders of the first barricade. Three remaining Germans and a machine-gun were captured by Private S. W. Coombs (of Adelaide), one of the crew of the Stokes mortars.

<sup>15</sup> Lieut. W. O. Jose, 50th Bn. Engineering student; of Adelaide; b. Ningpo, China, 25 March, 1895. Killed in action, 2 April, 1917.

<sup>16</sup> Lieut. W. V. H. L. Bidstrup, 50th Bn. Accountant; of Adelaide; b. Mitiamo, Vic., 13 May, 1889. Killed in action, 2 April, 1917.

<sup>17</sup> Sgt. J. Wilson, D.C.M. (No. 542; 50th Bn.). Locomotive chageman; of Broken Hill, N.S.W.; b. Aberdeenshire, Scotland, 26 Dec., 1881.

<sup>18</sup> Sgt. J. C. Jensen, V.C. (No. 2389; 50th Bn.). Labourer; of Adelaide; b. Logstor, Denmark, 1891. Died 1922.

<sup>19</sup> Pte. W. Q. O'Connor (of Milparinka district and Broken Hill, N.S.W.; killed in action on 25 April, 1918).

<sup>20</sup> He also released several Australian prisoners of the left company, including Sergeant A. Johanson (of Peterborough and Monash, S. Aust.), a Swede, who had been badly wounded. Jensen was awarded the Victoria Cross.

Most of the 50th's line had managed to sweep past, the Lewis gunners temporarily keeping down the enemy by firing from the hip as they advanced. The Germans at the cemetery were left to the attention of the special bombing party. The centre and left companies entered the village; east of the place the right company, under Captain Todd, duly carried out its change of direction and then, with its right on the bottom of the valley, moved forward towards its objective, the sunken road, 1,000 yards distant. All went well until half the distance had been crossed, when the advancing troops were observed by a German post farther south in that road, where it crossed the spur near Lagnicourt. This position should have been seized by the 52nd Battalion, but no sign of the 52nd could yet be seen. At the same time a detachment of German supports lower down and farther back under a scrub-covered bank on the same knuckle sighted the Australians and opened fire with rifles and a machine-gun.

Todd's company, now suffering heavy loss, stopped short of the objective road except at the bottom of the valley, where a small party, advancing by another sunken road which led through the objective at right angles, succeeded in reaching the crossways. Here Sergeant James<sup>21</sup> and one survivor of a Lewis gun crew posted themselves with the gun.

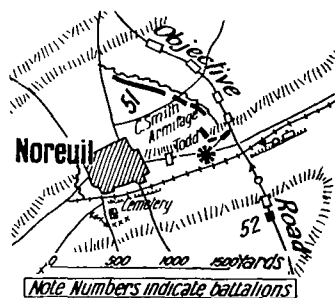
All this had occurred before the 51st completed its long advance post the other side of the village. Todd's company arrived entirely alone, and lying out under fierce fire which it could not suppress, became split into small parties, some obtaining shelter in craters, others in the sunken road, and a few in the southern end of the trench that was soon afterwards occupied farther up the slope by the 51st. Thus the two other companies of the 50th, under Captains Armitage and Churchill Smith, presently emerging from the village and advancing across the open on the flank of the 51st, did not at first observe Todd's company—as was usually the case where ground was swept with a dangerous fusillade, there were few signs of men or movement to be seen, the troops being pinned to cover. But on reaching the trench beside Captain Owen's<sup>22</sup> company of the 51st, and looking over their

<sup>21</sup> Sgt W. J. James (No. 1364; 50th Bn.). Bushman, of Broken Hill, N.S.W.; b. Broken Hill, 17 March, 1892. Killed in action, 2 April, 1917.

<sup>22</sup> Major N. P. Owen, M.C.; 51st Bn. Orchardist; of King River, Albany, W. Aust; b. Lymm, Cheshire, Eng., 24 April, 1877.

shoulders to ascertain the cause of the fusillade to their right rear, they observed here and there to the south of them Australians who were obviously being closely attacked. As they themselves in the shallow trench were now being enfiladed by the same machine-guns, they could do little to help. At this juncture the contact aeroplane came over. They lit their flares, and the observer duly reported the line lying along the shallow trench and at the crossways in the valley where Todd's Lewis gun was holding on the objective.

But by then it was almost over with the right company. The Lewis gun was shortly forced to withdraw, Sergeant James being killed. Germans from the objective road were trying to force their way from it into the sunken road down the valley, occupied by some of Todd's men. At this juncture a number of Germans streamed out of Noreuil along the bottom of the valley and approached Todd's company from its direct rear. Although it was not generally realised until afterwards, the "moppers-up" whom the centre and left companies had left to clear the village had been much too few for the task.<sup>23</sup> They were gradually so reduced by loss that the Germans eventually captured most of the remainder<sup>24</sup> and



now evacuated the town with their prisoners, and caught sight of Todd's company, part lying in the open, with its backs to them, and part lining the bank of the same road down which they themselves were withdrawing. They

<sup>23</sup> The bombing party which had stayed to deal with the Germans at the cemetery had been far outnumbered by them, and, after 14 of its 20 men had been killed, the remainder had been made prisoners. Most of the 60 other bombers detailed by the left and centre companies as "moppers-up" had probably reached the village, but on entering it Lieutenant J. E. Edwards (of Adelaide) could collect only eight of his men of the centre company. With them, he began to throw grenades into houses from which German machine-guns were firing on the rest of the troops, who had now passed on. When his men had been reduced to two, Edwards sent these to the company commander with a request for more, and eventually, as no word came back, went on himself. The "moppers up" of the other company also had been gradually shot down, until there were so few that the enemy had turned upon the one or two small parties remaining and captured them.

<sup>24</sup> Others were, however, at work, including Private Jensen (*see p. 213*). He captured a German officer or N C O., who pointed out to him the house from which resistance was coming.

immediately opened fire. Todd, already in extreme difficulties, ordered a couple of Lewis guns to fire to his rear, but the Germans were screened by their Australian prisoners, who, whether by accident or design, were marching in front of them. Within a short time one portion after another of Todd's company was surrounded and captured.

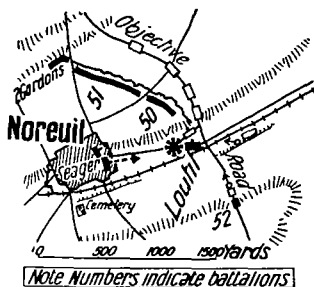
The Germans now lined the sunken road along the valley bed, at right angles to the other companies, and began to attack with bombs the southern end of the shallow trench. They were covered by a deadly enfilade fire from machine-guns on the spur near Lagnicourt, on whose crest-line, higher up, the 52nd Battalion could now be seen digging in. The German machine-guns were obviously sheltered from that battalion's fire, and the situation was an anxious one. At 7 o'clock Captains Armitage and Churchill Smith sent a message reporting the existence of the gap in the line (where Todd's company should have been) and the presence of the German machine-guns both in the valley and up the Lagnicourt road. Shortly afterwards Armitage sent Sergeant Wilson to the critical point on his right with orders to "take charge and hold on." The enemy was now making definite bombing attacks up the trench, and was thrice beaten back; but, one after another, the company Lewis gunners, who had to expose themselves in order to fire, were shot down by the enfilading machine-guns. At 8.45 Armitage wrote again:

Position on right is precarious, as he (the enemy) is in fair strength in gully and enfilades from right. Casualties increasing—casualties amongst Lewis gunners very severe. Two men per gun left. We are holding well and consolidation is proceeding favourably.

Wilson now built a barricade in the trench, and the 51st Battalion sent down several of its Lewis guns and their crews. A few minutes later Armitage, who had led with great spirit, was shot through the head while trying to ascertain the enemy's strength.

But the tension was soon to decrease. When next the Germans attacked up the trench, Wilson's party, which had fallen back thirty yards from the barricade, allowed them to reach it, and then threw a shower of bombs, the Lewis gunners at the same time sweeping with their fire the top of the barricade. Not a German got over it. The attack was shattered, and for some time the enemy's effort there ceased.

Lieutenant-Colonel Salisbury had received no word from Todd,<sup>25</sup> but the message sent by Churchill Smith and Armitage at 7 a.m. duly came through. Before receiving it, however, Salisbury had been notified by the 51st that Noreuil had not been properly cleared. He accordingly sent two platoons of the reserve company under Captain Seager<sup>26</sup> to move through it. After they had left, he received the 7 o'clock message, from which he inferred that Todd's company was in difficulties, and at once sent the last platoon of his reserve under Lieutenant Rule, to assist. Rule moved down to the railway cutting in the valley, but could find no trace of Todd. While Rule's men remained in the valley under sharp fire—by which he himself was mortally wounded—there came to him Major Loutit,<sup>27</sup> sent by Salisbury to clear up the situation. Loutit quickly grasped the position. In the valley where Todd's line should have been he could see a number of Germans with their backs half-turned to him, lining a branch of the same road in which he stood and busily firing, in direct enfilade, into the flank of the Australians in the shallow trench. The situation seemed so critical that Loutit decided not to wait for the two platoons under Seager, which were still working through the village, but to attack at once with Rule's small force. A hundred yards or so behind the Germans was a diverging branch of the same road. So intent were they on their task that Loutit was able to lead the platoon into this branch unobserved. He lined his men on the bank, told each rifleman and the Lewis gunner to pick his man and aim carefully, and then gave the word to fire. The line of Germans slid down the bank out of sight, and the enemy did not again enter the cross-road.



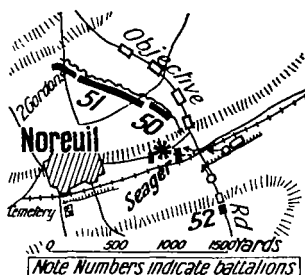
But Loutit's party was now observed by the German post in the scrubby bank farther down the valley, which turned

<sup>25</sup> After the action, one of Todd's runners was found, dead; on him was a note saying that the company had been cut off.

<sup>26</sup> Major H. W. H. Seager, M.C., V.D.; 50th Bn. Bank official, of Adelaide; b. Powlett, Vic., 6 July, 1893.

<sup>27</sup> The same who, on 25 April, 1915, as a subaltern had reached the nearest point to the Narrows attained by the troops in Gallipoli (see Vol. I, p. 344-9).

on it a machine-gun. To avoid heavy loss, he withdrew 250 yards to a large mine-crater at the point where his road branched, leaving the Lewis-gun crew to hold the branch road, if possible. They, however, were quickly driven in by machine-gun fire, but just then Seager's two platoons emerged from the village. These had found a few Germans with some Australian prisoners, and had reversed their positions. On joining Loutit, Seager at once charged the objective road, but, on nearing it, was met with very heavy fire from machine-guns farther down the valley, and, when close to the road, the charging line was turned. A second attempt also failed, and Loutit accordingly decided to hold the crater and to endeavour by fire from there to suppress the enemy in the road. By volleys and machine-gun fire<sup>28</sup> throughout the afternoon Seager's men kept out of action the German machine-gun high on the slope below the 52nd.<sup>29</sup> Loutit meanwhile went on to the line of the 51st in the shallow trench. From a report-centre now established at the other end of Noreuil, he was eventually able to inform Colonel Salisbury by telephone that the gap in the line, though not filled, was now sufficiently commanded; and, although Seager wrote offering to charge the road again if a company were put in on his right to keep down the machine-gun, Salisbury was satisfied that the line could be held as it was, and did not sanction a further attempt.



Shortly before dusk the 51st observed a number of Germans on its front moving as if to counter-attack. The artillery, being informed, laid down a barrage and sent the

<sup>28</sup> A Vickers machine-gun which lay on the railway—most of its crew having been shot down—was brought to the crater and there emplaced, with two riflemen to assist its gunner (Corporal F. G. Bennetts, of New Queenstown, S. Aust.). His officer, Lieutenant B. L. Holloway (of White Cliffs and Wilcannia, N.S.W.), had been wounded.

<sup>29</sup> This post lay between two barricades on the road high up the slope between Noreuil and Lagnicourt. It first held the upper barricade, but after a while retired to the lower. The German machine-gunners made three attempts to cross the valley for ammunition, but their heads could be seen bobbing up and down behind the road-bank as they ran. Only one man got across, and he was shot on the way back.

enemy to cover. No counter-attack was made. At dusk two posts were put out to connect Seager's position with that of the 52nd.<sup>30</sup> Seager intended to rush the road at dawn; but at 2.30 he himself, patrolling, found it empty along its whole length,<sup>31</sup> the Germans having retired. It was at once occupied by posts, and on the night of April 3rd became the front line of the 13th Brigade.

The attack on the line of villages farther north had met with difficulties which, though slighter, were not unlike those encountered at Noreuil, and had everywhere succeeded. The most striking success was at Croisilles, which had been first cut off by part of a brigade of each army passing it on both sides and joining hands beyond, and then "mopped up" in the afternoon by a battalion specially allotted. Longatte, past which the Australian left had swept at 5.30, was not cleared until 8 a.m. On the other side of Ecooust the 9th Devons suffered many casualties at the cemetery, where 3 machine-guns were afterwards captured. In Henin there was severe fighting, but 57 prisoners were taken. The two brigades of the 7th Division suffered about 400 casualties. The loss of the 13th Australian Infantry Brigade exceeded 600, the 50th Battalion losing 360, of whom 5 officers and over 90 men were killed, and about 60 made prisoners.<sup>32</sup> The fate of Todd's company only became gradually known during the course of the next few days, when the wounded were collected.<sup>33</sup> Of the Germans, 113 were made prisoners and 7 machine-guns were taken.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> The commander of the 52nd, Lieut.-Colonel H. Pope (formerly of Pope's Hill in Gallipoli), had believed and reported that his flank had been advanced to the position intended. During the afternoon, however, his intelligence officer, Lieutenant J. H. Julin, reported its precise position, several hundred yards short of the battalion's objective. It was near the top of the spur, screened from sight of the valley, whereas it should have been near the bottom of the spur. The strong enemy post with double barricade intervened.

<sup>31</sup> In some deep dugouts near the cross-roads were found half-a-dozen badly wounded Australians of Todd's company whom the enemy had left there.

<sup>32</sup> The Germans originally took about 100 prisoners (their reports claimed 300), but a number were recaptured, and between 10 and 20 were shot down by the Australian machine-guns from the 52nd's position, being mistaken for Germans as their line left the Bullecourt road to make its way to the rear. The guns reported: "At 6 a.m. party of 150 Germans dispersed in 6.11.B (just beyond the objective road). Casualties unknown." The loss in the other units in this action was: 51st Battalion—7 officers (including Captain L. L. Smith and Lieutenant J. H. Minchin killed) and 198 others; 49th—7; 52nd—25; 13th Machine Gun Company—11; 13th Light Trench Mortar Battery—3 (Smith belonged to Melbourne and Berwick, Vic; Minchin to Midland Junction, W. Aust.)

<sup>33</sup> One wounded man had lain for three days in a shell-hole, covering himself with snow to escape detection by the enemy.

<sup>34</sup> Two of the guns, however, were from a fallen aeroplane. Seventy of the prisoners were taken by the 50th Battalion, and forty by the 51st. Another report places the prisoners at 127.

German records show that Noreuil was defended on this day by the I Battalion, 119th R.I.R.,<sup>35</sup> and Ecoust-Longatte by the III Battalion, 180th I.R. No signs of the immediate imminence of the attack upon Noreuil had been observed, and it was not expected for a day or two; but, as the capture of Lagnicourt had obviously given the Australians an advantageous starting-point, one company of the 119th was made responsible for the defence of Noreuil on that side, a second manning the western and northern defences.

The reports that reached the headquarters of the rear-guard battalion on the morning of the 2nd were utterly conflicting. First came the news that the village had been attacked shortly after 5.15, presumably from the south, and that the assault had been beaten off. Later the 3rd company and the 1st (in close reserve) reported that they had taken "300 prisoners." But meanwhile, at 5.45, there appeared to come a second assault (evidently the attack by the 51st), which broke through the lines north of the village and practically surrounded it.<sup>36</sup> South of Ecoust the Württembergers fell back on the railway line, where the 5th Battery, 26th Field Artillery Regiment, continued to fire over open sights till its ammunition was exhausted.<sup>37</sup> In Noreuil fragments of the 3rd and 4th companies of the 119th R.I.R., and part of an unrelieved platoon of the II/121st R.I.R., escaped, but the two company commanders of the 119th<sup>38</sup> were killed, and nothing more was heard of those men who had remained with them. A counter-attack was made by the 2nd company from the railway embankment at 9.45 a.m., upon the ridge north of Noreuil. It was preceded by a "heavy preparatory bombardment," but the 51st Australian Battalion, against which it was launched, does not appear to have remarked any special offensive by the enemy at this hour. Of the reported "300" Australian prisoners, only 60 arrived at the German regimental headquarters,<sup>39</sup> and it was therefore assumed (in gross exaggeration of the truth) that "several hundreds" were cut down by the machine-guns of their own side, which had fired on them by mistake.<sup>40</sup>

The I/119th R.I.R. in this fight lost 237. Including the casualties suffered by those elements of the 120th R.I.R. and 180th I.R., which were on the Australian front, the German loss at Noreuil was probably 275. The attack, though thoroughly successful, was more than twice as dear as the defence.

<sup>35</sup> The III Battalion, which had defeated Gellibrand's reconnaissance on March 20, had been relieved on March 28 by the II/121st R.I.R., which in turn was relieved on the 30th by the I/119th R.I.R.

<sup>36</sup> The German reports are, naturally, not reliable as to the precise hour. It is rather characteristic of a certain class of comment, not confined to the German side, that, although they were sister units, both Württemberg and of the same division, each of the regiments holding the Ecoust-Noreuil front lays the blame on its neighbour. The historian of the 119th R.I.R. says that at 6 a.m. German troops were suddenly seen streaming back from Ecoust-St. Mein. The historian of the 180th, on the other hand, claims that the British penetrated the lines of the unit on its left, where they "apparently found no special resistance." The probability is that the inner flank of each regiment gave way—certainly that of the 119th did.

<sup>37</sup> Its guns were eventually hauled back by the infantry.

<sup>38</sup> Lieutenants of Reserve Eisenhardt and Steinhilber.

<sup>39</sup> The German *communiqué*, and the report of the XIV Corps, give this figure. The history of the 119th R.I.R. gives the number as 89.

<sup>40</sup> The German reports imply that the firing was intentional. A similar accusation, probably just as unfounded, was often made against the Germans.



Thus, on the left half of the Fifth Army's front, the last obstacle to Gough's projected "diversion" against the Hindenburg Line had apparently been removed, and all the divisions there now began pushing their posts closer to the main defences which scarred the open country a mile, or even less, ahead of them. Through this foreground, on the Australian front, ran the light railway from Cambrai towards Arras, and its alternate cuttings and embankments, lying roughly parallel to the Hindenburg Line, afforded an obvious line of shelter to be attained. The 49th (Queensland) Battalion, which now took over the line beyond Noreuil, experienced several days of considerable strain while advancing to them. The position of the enemy's forward posts was uncertain until a patrol under the scout-sergeant of the 49th, W. W. King,<sup>41</sup> located them at the railway cutting,<sup>42</sup> with a still more advanced post in a large road-crater 600 yards from the Australian line.<sup>43</sup> Shortly before dawn on April 5th Major Fortescue's company, advancing on a front of 600 yards under a barrage, rushed first this post and then the railway cutting, securing a few prisoners. The Germans, however, were still posted along the railway farther west, and on this flank they resisted stubbornly, a sharp bomb-fight taking place. The Queenslanders barricaded the cutting on their left, but when daylight arrived they found that the Germans had a machine-gun in some well concealed position, sweeping straight down it. Lieutenant Maunder<sup>44</sup> was killed at the barricade, and no less than 53 of the company's 120 men were shot down,<sup>45</sup> but the enemy was kept away by rifles, machine-guns, and artillery, and the company, though cut off from reinforcement, held on. During

<sup>41</sup> Sgt. W. W. King, M.M. (No. 3391; 49th Bn.). Farmer; of Alstonville, N.S.W.; b. Mudgee, N.S.W., 19 Jan., 1893.

<sup>42</sup> Patrols of Captain Seager's men had probed for about a mile ahead, but in the direction of Quéant.

<sup>43</sup> King, lying out behind this post, watched a party of fifteen Germans making their way to it.

<sup>44</sup> Lieut. D. S. Maunder, 49th Bn. Turner and fitter; of Toowoomba, Q'land; b. Chelmer, Q'land, 21 Feb., 1892. Killed in action, 5 April, 1917.

<sup>45</sup> Among the killed was Sergeant T. M. Scott, who led the 49th's bombers at Mouquet Farm. The narrative has been based partly on the diary of Sergeant V. Cross (of Mosman, N.S.W., and Mary's Creek, Q'land), who was himself wounded during the bomb-fight.

the following night other companies and the 52nd Battalion (now put in on the left) came up and secured the railway on either flank.

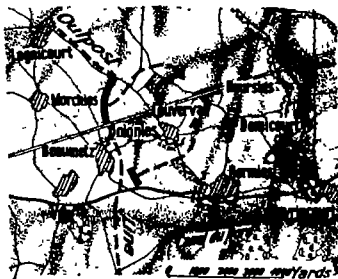
German records show that the force opposing the 49th on the railway embankment was the 6th company, 119th R.I.R. This regiment now withdrew its front to the Hindenburg Line. Farther west the 180th I.R. had retired thither on April 2, maintaining only strong patrols in front.

The narrative must now turn to the attack made by the right division (5th) of the I Anzac Corps upon Doignies and Louverval. As has already been mentioned, this operation being well to the south of the region of the main offensive, was not so urgent as the capture of Noreuil, and it was undertaken in somewhat different circumstances, inasmuch as the supporting artillery was weaker and the attacking troops—the 14th (New South Wales) Brigade—were not fresh from a rest area. In an appreciation dated March 31st, General White had expressed a doubt whether, without a rest, the 5th Division could effect much more than it had done. Nevertheless the last few days, spent on the green plateau near Bapaume with the Somme battlefield definitely left behind, had greatly refreshed the troops, and they were in good spirits.

The main German outpost-line had not yet been attacked on the front of this division, and the southernmost village in it, Hermies, lying close to the corps boundary, could not well be assaulted until the XV Corps advanced. Brigadier-General Elliott, however, had put forward a plan for capturing the two villages farther north—Louverval, a small hamlet with a large château and wood, lying close on the north side of the Cambrai road, and Doignies, a larger village, half-a-mile south of the same road. Elliott's plan had been to strike past them on either flank, ignoring the villages, and forming a line around and beyond them.<sup>46</sup> The scheme was adopted by Brigadier-General Hobkirk of the 14th Brigade, which relieved

<sup>46</sup> This plan was somewhat similar to that by which the 7th and 21st British Divisions took Croisilles (*see* p. 219).

Elliott's on March 29th, and was to be carried out by his two reserve battalions, the 55th and 56th. Owing to the weakness of the artillery,<sup>47</sup> the infantry commanders preferred to attack by surprise, at night, without a barrage. The guns would, however, be prepared to protect the troops, if called on during the operation. As guns were not otherwise to be used, it was necessary to choose points of entry free from wire-entanglement, but fortunately, although the



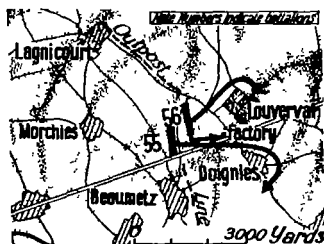
*Elliott's scheme of attack.*

western defences of both Doignies and Hermies were wired, there was between the two villages an unwired space through which the 55th Battalion could advance to cut off Doignies on the south and east. The 56th, which would cut off Louverval on the north and east, was not faced by wire. Except for the large wood surrounding Louverval Château, the main obstacle on that flank was the shallow open valley, running to the north-east, which the troops on the left must cross diagonally when approaching to attack. The fact that this was commanded by numerous German machine-gun posts furnished another strong reason for attacking by night. It was accordingly decided to launch the 5th Division's assault about an hour earlier than the operations against Noreuil, Ecoust, and Croisilles.

On the afternoon of March 31st, however, observers of the 53rd Battalion, then holding the line opposite Doignies, concluded from the constant movement of Germans in the posts lying between that village and Hermies that the enemy had now linked them into a continuous line. Reports of patrols and air-photographs indicated that there were extensive entanglements around Doignies, and it was suspected that the gap south of the village had been filled. These reports gave rise to keen anxiety lest the 55th, attempting to move round Doignies on the south, might become hung up on the wire or be itself cut

<sup>47</sup> It consisted of the 14th Brigade, A.F.A., reinforced by two batteries—7th and 50th—the whole under Lieut.-Colonel O. F. Phillips.

off.<sup>48</sup> General Hobbs, conferring next day with the brigadier and battalion commander, overcame the difficulty by the ingenious suggestion that, instead of attacking from the south, the 55th should advance into the German lines behind the 56th from the north, and then sweep down upon Doignies from behind the defences of the village. To clear the way for the 55th, a German advanced post lying between the two villages—at a beetroot factory on the main Cambrai road—would have to be taken: for this purpose the right company of the 56th would be diverted slightly to the south of that battalion's advance. The 56th, which was commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Humphrey Scott, one of those keen young subalterns of the Landing who were promoted to battalion command in the reorganisation in Egypt,<sup>49</sup> spent the morning of April 1st practising the attack, after careful explanation, over similar ground near Frémicourt, Louverval wood, village, trenches, and beetroot factory being represented by flags. During this day the 78th and 88th Siege Batteries, having moved up to Beugny, shelled the factory, some of the German posts, and the roads beyond.



About midnight<sup>50</sup> the two battalions moved to their starting positions immediately north of the Cambrai road, the 56th assembling along the Beaumetz-Quéant road, and the 55th along another road 250 yards in rear of it. Each battalion had three companies in line and one in reserve. At 4 o'clock Colonel Scott, after going the round of his companies to assure himself that they were in correct formation, led them to the summit of the rise, 200 yards farther on, so as to allow the 55th to come forward to the road which he vacated, and there to extend into three waves for the attack.

<sup>48</sup> General Hobkirk pointed out that this alteration in the conditions "may make this attack very costly, and, as the objective is a mile and a half—and over—away from our lines, the question of getting back our wounded, if we don't get in, will be very great." In these anxieties Major P. W. Woods, the commander of the 55th, fully shared.

<sup>49</sup> See Vol III, pp 47, 50-1

<sup>50</sup> The 56th at Frémicourt moved at midnight, the 55th at Vélú somewhat earlier

At 4 a.m. the front-line commander of the battalion on Scott's left, the 57th,<sup>51</sup> sent a messenger to arrange concerning the thrusting out of one of its platoons in conjunction with one of the 56th across the dangerous valley on that flank of the attack. Scott, to whom had been left the decision of the exact moment for the advance, now fixed the hour at 5 o'clock—his earlier intention having been to launch it at 4.30. At 5 the 56th moved forward. By 7 brigade headquarters was informed that both villages had been captured. But it was many hours later before the situation at Louverval became in any way clear.

It is now known that the 55th Battalion, expecting the advance to begin at 4.45, had gone forward at that hour.<sup>52</sup> The centre and left companies, finding the waiting lines of the 56th ahead, duly remained in rear of them, but the right company actually passed, without being aware of it, between the two southern companies of the 56th. The commander of this company, Captain Stutchbury (a youngster who had served as a subaltern with the parent battalion<sup>53</sup> in Gallipoli), kept his right 200 yards north of the Cambrai road, the trees along which could be dimly seen, and pushed on in silence until a small dog resembling an Australian kelpie jumped up from the stubble barking and then trotted along beside the leading officer, Lieutenant Duprez.<sup>54</sup> A few minutes later figures, at first assumed to belong to the 56th, were seen moving in front. But, when the dog ran to them and began to growl, several rifles flashed and a number of bombs burst. Stutchbury hastily extended his men, who were till then in artillery formation, ordered five rounds of rapid fire, and then charged. Most of the enemy, who had been lining a sunken road, ran to the rear, others to dugouts down whose stairs the Australians rolled bombs. Others could be seen barely a stone's throw to the left, and Stutchbury, recognising that he was ahead of the force, and fearing that these Germans might enfilade the detachment of the 56th attacking

<sup>51</sup> In order to give General Hobkirk sufficient reserves for emergencies, his other two battalions, the 53rd and 54th, had been relieved by one from each of the other brigades of the division, and were resting at Morchies and Vêlu respectively. Thus the line north of the Cambrai road was now held by the 57th Battalion (Victoria), and that south of it by the 31st (Victoria and Queensland).

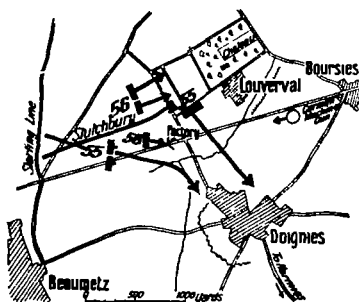
<sup>52</sup> Major Woods informed his company commanders that the 56th had moved.

<sup>53</sup> The 3rd Battalion.

<sup>54</sup> Lieut. A. A. Duprez, M.C.; 55th Bn. Clerk; of Ashfield, N.S.W.; b. Coolamon, N.S.W., 1 June, 1894.

the beetroot factory, was much tempted to turn northward and clear them out. A moment's thought, however, convinced him that the only safe course was to carry out his part in the plan and trust that others would do the same. He therefore formed his company facing towards Doignies<sup>55</sup> and lay close in front of Louverval, waiting for the centre and left companies to arrive.

These, however, had become somewhat mixed with the 56th, and some time passed before he saw the men of the right company of the 56th advancing rapidly to attack the beetroot factory, and, beyond them again, the two companies of his own battalion approaching, not on his left as had been planned, but on his right rear. As it was fast becoming light, he waited no longer, but directed his company straight on the north-eastern part of Doignies. He was now moving past the rear of the village defences, a third of a mile to his right, and fired on them. No resistance came from that direction. Far on the left a machine-gun on the high ground near Boursies (the next village along the Cambrai road) was firing at the company, its scattered bullets flicking up the dust ahead; but a Lewis gun turned upon it caused this fire to cease. Directly ahead some part of the enemy, collecting behind a hedge between Stutchbury and the village, opened fire. His company again charged, and the Germans ran back to a farther hedge fringing the sunken road that ran out of the north-east corner of the village. At this stage the Germans on the right evidently perceived the other two companies moving down upon them—although not from the rear, as had been intended, but from the flank—and, realising the danger of encirclement, streamed away over the open south of the town. The two companies had turned southwards before reaching the point intended, and the running Germans escaped, only a few

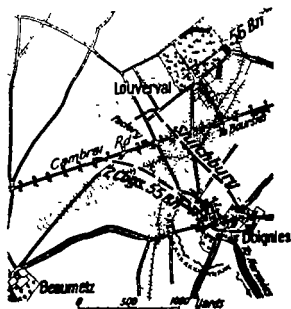


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<sup>55</sup> He formed the company on a road leading north-eastward to Louverval village.

being brought down by distant shots. The detachment of the enemy opposing Stutchbury also made off, and the three companies of the 55th took up their intended positions beyond the eastern and southern outskirts of the village.

The actual capture of Doignies was thus early effected, almost without loss—a result entirely due to surprise. The Germans had left their breakfast uneaten, and had not exploded their prepared mines, whose wires were discovered at several points stretched across the streets. On these being pulled there followed explosions by which, it was reported, several men were injured.<sup>56</sup> A more serious cause of loss was a machine-gun near Boursies—possibly the same that had fired earlier—which was persistently turned on the troops north-east of Doignies. Here throughout the day there remained a wide gap in the line.



The attack on Louverval, in spite of the careful preparations, had been more confused. To mark the direction for the advance, the scouts of the 56th had placed in front of its assembly position boards covered on the near side with luminous paint. As the battalion moved over the summit of the diagonal ridge on whose farther slope the village and wood lay, rifle shots rang out and a machine-gun opened. It was thought that the enemy had seen the advancing scouts of the 56th, but the disturbance was probably that which was created by Stutchbury's early advance. Immediately afterwards two mines were exploded in Louverval village.<sup>57</sup> On the right a flare shot up, but the German who fired it was at once bayoneted by the scouts. Part of the right company, guided by the intelligence officer of the battalion, Lieutenant Watt, made straight for the beetroot factory. This was

<sup>56</sup> A messenger pulled one of these wires, and three charges exploded. A private named McEwan (of Sydney) tripped over another wire near a bridge. An explosion immediately occurred in the water, but the bridge was not damaged. Near the same place he found a second wire. On this being pulled, a house—presumed to have been used as a headquarters—blew up. In one of the dugouts a bomb, rolled down the stairs, exploded a charge.

<sup>57</sup> No Australian was injured by them.

protected by a wire-entanglement, but the troops, moving round the wire, quickly seized the place and held it while the 55th passed by. The remainder of the right company<sup>58</sup> pushed forward to seize the high ground towards Boursies; but in the increasing daylight the German machine-gun which had previously been turned on Stutchbury was able to check this movement, and the flank only reached the low ground south-east of Louverval village.

Colonel Scott appears to have instructed his troops to pass through the village and wood of Louverval—not around them, as was intended in the original plan. A German machine-gun was firing from the direction of the wood, whose felled trees could now be distinguished ahead. The shots “cracked” so low and angrily that the whole line, coming upon an unexpected cross-road, threw itself down under cover of the road-bank. Two minutes later, when it went on, the machine-gun stopped, and the left and centre of the 56th quickly reached the edge of the wood. This itself, however, proved an extraordinary difficult obstacle. Its trees had been of great size, and the Germans had felled them by cutting the trunks about two feet from the earth. Men who tried to crawl under found themselves prevented by their packs. Those who attempted to climb over found that the top of the trunk, being from four to five feet from the ground, was almost insurmountable to heavily weighted troops.

The left and centre of the 56th were entirely split up by this obstacle. Captain Smythe of the left company, however, and some of his men made their way along the northern edge of the wood and reached its eastern edge. It was by now becoming light. Germans, evidently part of the former garrison of the wood, could be seen on the summit of the same spur about 400 yards to the north-east, lying down in an extended line and firing at the Australians as they emerged. A machine-gun was firing from a sunken road near by, and some of the 56th succeeded in rushing the gunner, whom they bayoneted, and bringing in the gun, which they then tried to turn upon the enemy. A German bullet,

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<sup>58</sup> At first under Captain G. H. Mann (of Rose Bay, N.S.W.), but, after he was wounded, under Lieutenant A. W. Hicks (of Petersham, N.S.W.).



however, put it out of action. Farther south also, some of the 56th had reached the eastern end of the wood, cutting off twenty retreating Germans, most of whom they shot down.<sup>59</sup> Some of the 56th were trickling through the wood, but many others were still west of it, and Smythe spent the next half-hour going back there and bringing them to its forward edge. Others had come through the village and with them he and other leaders formed a line as far as the Cambrai road, enclosing both the wood and the hamlet. There the contact airmen of the 3rd Squadron,<sup>60</sup> flying over at 6.35 and sounding their horn, saw the flares duly lit by the infantry to signal their positions. The losses, however, had been sharp. Many leaders had been hit, including Lieutenant O'Halloran<sup>61</sup> of the left company, who was killed at the north-east corner of the wood.<sup>62</sup>

It was this corner, lying on the Louverval ridge, facing Boursies across the valley, which offered the most obvious target, and it was at once chosen by the enemy for counter-attack. The batteries of the German rear-guard in Demi-court, less than two miles to the south-east, had quickly turned upon it and tore up its north-eastern corner with their shells. The platoon of the 56th and that of the neighbouring 57th, which were to have safeguarded the flank in the exposed valley behind this ridge, had both been driven in by machine-gun fire, and the left company of the 56th, holding the shelled corner, was also driven back. The German supports counter-attacked from the north-east, and some of them filtered along the sunken road leading into that corner and surrounded and captured one or two men of the 56th who still held their original post.

About the same time the Germans who had been driven back by the 55th from Doignies, and had since been observed digging in three-quarters of a mile south-east of the village,

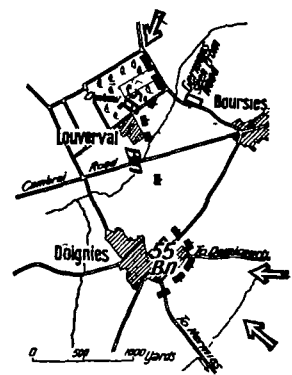
<sup>59</sup> The Germans, seeing that escape was impossible, waved a white cloth, but were shot, with the exception of two who were made prisoners.

<sup>60</sup> Lieutenants J. K. Summers and C. T. Cleaver.

<sup>61</sup> Lieut. W. E. O'Halloran, 56th Bn. Town and shire clerk; of Warialda, N.S.W.; b Sydney, 9 June, 1885. Killed in action, 2 April, 1917.

<sup>62</sup> This heavy loss of leaders was inevitable in a confused situation in which much guidance was required. By midday eight officers of the 56th had been hit, including Captain Smythe himself and Captain Mann of the right company. Lieutenant C. L. Chauncy (of Sydney) died of his wounds.

were reinforced from Demicourt by two companies, which advanced as if to attack Doignies from the east. At 6.55, however, the contact airmen observed them and sent out a "zone call" to the artillery, informing it of the movement.<sup>63</sup> This call was picked up by the wireless station at the headquarters of the 14th A.F.A. Brigade, and was sent on to the 7th and 53rd Batteries which at once shelled those areas. The 26th Heavy Battery also opened fire. Within twelve minutes the airmen dropped at one of the advanced batteries a note:



*Arrows show counter-attacks and threatened counter-attacks.*

The fire directed over the enemy infantry in J.17.B. & D has been excellent. The Huns are still in a pretty thick line about J.17.D.9.7.

The field batteries continued to fire at the area indicated by these map references, expending in all 400 shells, with the result that, if a counter-attack was intended, it never developed. It would have had little chance of success, since the 55th had ten Lewis guns and two Vickers machine-guns established around Doignies with a clear field of fire.<sup>64</sup>

The German effort to retake Louverval Wood was more dangerous. At a comparatively late hour in the morning a number of the men forming the left of the 56th were found to be in rear of the wood, and the intelligence officer, Lieutenant Watt, was sent forward with them through the trees. On its eastern edge being reached, a large number of Germans were seen lining the bank of a road leading from that point towards Boursies. The Australians had these

<sup>63</sup> The call stated that two bodies of infantry, each 200 strong, were advancing, and indicated their positions. The first message received by the artillery was: "JX200 FAN J17B99"—that is to say, that 200 infantry were stationary at J.17.B.9.9 (the map reference).

<sup>64</sup> The airmen also at 7.20 dropped a note at the headquarters of the 55th informing Major Woods that 500 of the enemy were advancing on Doignies from the east. He telegraphed to Colonel Scott of the 56th, who telephoned to Captain H. A. Roberts (of Greenwich, N.S.W.), the senior officer in the firing line of the 56th, ordering him to assist as far as possible. The assistance was not, however, required.

Germans directly enfiladed and, a Lewis gun being at once turned on them, they broke back across country. Meanwhile, at 8.30, the observers of the 55th Battery had detected parties of the enemy attempting to reach the wood from the north-east, and had driven them back.

This ended all serious counter-attack. South of the wood a line had already been established by Lieutenant Gordon and other officers. South of the main road the right of the 56th, now under Lieutenant Hicks,<sup>65</sup> eventually succeeded in suppressing, by rifle-fire, the machine-gun which troubled the flank during most of the day. The Germans withdrew the gun, and the 56th then occupied its position. Later, south-west of Boursies and at Hermies, Germans were observed moving in a manner which seemed to presage a counter-attack. They were accordingly shelled by the supporting batteries, and no counter-attack occurred. At dusk the gap of over half-a-mile between the 55th and the 56th was closed by a company of the 53rd, and in the night (during which snow fell heavily) the difficult valley on the left flank was occupied by posts of both 56th and 57th.<sup>66</sup> After day-break on April 3rd these had again to be withdrawn, but they were finally established on the following night.

The capture of these villages cost the 14th Brigade 484 casualties, those of the 55th being mostly slight and due to bullets, but a fair number throughout the brigade being caused by the subsequent shelling of Doignies, Louverval, and Beaumetz.<sup>67</sup> Only twelve prisoners were captured.

The history of the German 94th Infantry Regiment (38th Division), whose III Battalion, supported by a company of the I/96th I.R., was responsible for the defence of the front from Louverval to Hermies, merely mentions that its outpost-companies were driven back after heavy fighting. According to Germans who were captured, the 88th British Siege Battery had on April 1 made a terribly effective hit at the beetroot factory with one shell, which killed fifteen men and wounded twenty-five. The Germans retired to a line of field defences in front of Boursies, Demicourt, and Hermies.

<sup>65</sup> Lieut. A. W. Hicks, M.C.; 56th Bn. Schoolmaster; of Petersham, N.S.W.; b. Sydney, 29 Sept., 1884.

<sup>66</sup> The 56th was relieved late that night, but in its turn at once relieved the 57th. The 55th was relieved on the night of April 3.

<sup>67</sup> The casualties were about equally divided between the 55th and 56th Battalions, in the former seven officers were hit, in the latter eight.

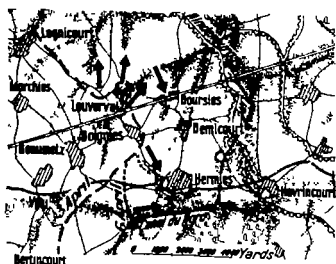
The Fifth Army had thus secured all the objectives set for April 2nd, and taken at one blow practically the whole German rear-guard positions; but the result still left three villages—Boursies, Demicourt, and Hermies—intervening between the southern division of I Anzac and the Hindenburg Line. The task of capturing these was left to the 1st Australian Division, which on April 6th, coming up fresh from three weeks' training, began to take over from the front-line units of the 5th Division. In order to allow the division on the left (the 4th) to concentrate its strength for the projected "diversion" in connection with the Arras offensive, the 1st Division took over a very extended front, including not only that of the 5th Division, but the whole Lagnicourt sector previously held by the 4th. This front it held with two brigades, the 3rd north of the Bapaume-Cambrai road and the 1st south of it. The four days' bombardment that was to precede the British Army's offensive had then begun. It was decided that the capture of the three remaining villages on the southern Anzac front should take place on the same morning as the offensive, which it might indirectly assist as a minor feint. When the Arras bombardment was extended by an extra day, postponing the great attack until April 9th, the 1st Division's operation also was deferred. Its precise hour was to be chosen by the divisional commander, Major-General Walker, who was merely informed that the three villages must be taken before noon on the 9th.

The villages lay on open, gently-rolling country—Hermies a straggling town opposite the extreme right of the corps, just north of the deep cutting of the Canal du Nord,<sup>68</sup> on whose opposite bank lay the large wood of Havrincourt, still held by the Germans; Boursies, a double line of poor houses straggling along either side of the Cambrai road; Demicourt, a smaller hamlet lying by itself in the fields half-way between the other two. Hermies had formed part of the enemy's original rear-guard outpost-line, and had been practically connected with Doignies by both wire entanglement and a line of trench. On parts of its western face there had been dug at one time or another no less than three trench-lines, but they

<sup>68</sup> This waterway, to connect the headstreams of the Somme and Scheldt, had been under construction when the war broke out, and was, of course, still unfinished

were probably not held as such. The wire entanglement and defences around the western and part of the northern and southern sides, however, rendered it a formidable position to attack, and Generals Birdwood and White suggested that the effort should first be concentrated on Hermies alone, leaving Boursies and Demicourt to be attacked later.

This opinion, however, was afterwards modified, it being held that the task would be easier if all three were attacked at once. Walker and his chief general staff officer, Colonel Blamey, came to the conclusion that the easiest way of taking Hermies would be to strike ostentatiously at Boursies, the northernmost village, and, under cover of this "diversion," to capture the southernmost, Hermies, by surprise. With these two taken, it was expected that the enemy would evacuate Demicourt. In order to advertise the threat against Boursies, the 3rd Brigade was ordered to seize, twenty-four hours before the main assault, a protruding position on the two spurs north of that village and of Louverval respectively. The capture of this area could only have one meaning—that the Australians intended to assault Boursies in the same way as they had already stormed Doignies, from its northern flank. The actual seizure of Boursies by the same brigade would follow the next morning. At the same time a battalion of the 1st Brigade, which would have quietly assembled south-east of Doignies, would descend on Hermies (as the 55th had done on Doignies) from the north-west, inside the lines of the enemy's defences; part of another battalion would assist on the south. The village was to be surrounded and then cleared. Meanwhile the 1st Brigade would have a third battalion watching Demicourt, ready to occupy it at the first sign that the enemy was leaving it.



*Projected preliminary attacks shown by shaded arrows; main attack by dark arrows.*

The preliminary movement to secure ground north of Boursies was launched at 3 a.m. on April 8th by two companies of the 12th (Tasmania, etc.) Battalion immediately north of the Cambrai road, and by two of the 10th (South Australia),

**Boursies—  
first stage**

which that day had relieved part of the 12th, east and north of Louverval Wood. The spur on whose eastern side Louverval lay—which may be called “Louverval Spur”—opening out, as it gently descended, into a long, clubbed plateau, had been a continual cause of trouble during the attack on Louverval and since. A number of machine-guns emplaced on its wide summit swept the two valleys and spurs on either side, and the Australian line had never yet been straightened across the valley west of it, which the flanking platoons of the 56th and 57th had on April 2nd and 3rd found so difficult to secure.

The companies of the 10th were now charged with the task of carrying forward for half-a-mile—in parts, three-quarters of a mile—the line in this neighbourhood. Although there was no barrage to awaken the enemy, the advance of the two companies was quickly observed. Flares were thrown from the German posts, and rifles and machine-guns opened. For this advance, the new methods of attack which the 1st Division had been practising—in which each platoon, with its Lewis gunners, rifle-grenadiers, bombers, and riflemen, was regarded as a separate little force, ready for fighting down nests of opponents—were useless: the left company (under Captain de Courcy-Ireland<sup>69</sup>) with some 100 men held a front of 1,600 yards, and the right company (under Captain McCann, of Pozières fame) about the same. Each leader had wisely divided his company into about fourteen posts, each post comprising three or four riflemen and two or three bombers under an N.C.O.; and the whole advanced in one rough line, widely extended. The movement continued until McCann and all his subalterns had been hit—Lieutenants Roy Fordham (who with Loutit had penetrated farthest at Gallipoli<sup>70</sup>) and O'Brien<sup>71</sup> being killed, and Lieutenant Walsh<sup>72</sup> wounded. Through high-spirited leading, a position was reached 200 to 400 yards beyond the corner of Louverval Wood, and half-a-mile or more in advance of the old front

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<sup>69</sup> Capt. W. S. de Courcy Ireland, 10th Bn. Stock salesman; of Millicent, S. Aust.; b Kapunda, S. Aust., 30 Nov., 1891.

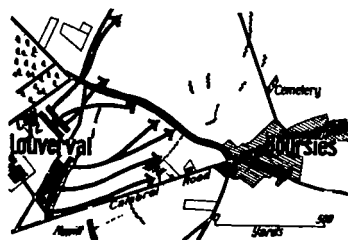
<sup>70</sup> See Vol I, p. 346.

<sup>71</sup> Lieut. W. O'Brien, 10th Bn. Ship's purser; of Alberton, S. Aust.; b. Alberton, 8 Oct., 1892. Killed in action, 8 April, 1917.

<sup>72</sup> Lieut. D. J. Walsh, M.C.; 10th Bn. Clerk; of Adelaide, b. Wallaroo, S. Aust., 3 March, 1884. Died, 12 Aug., 1918.

across the valley on the left, and there the companies held on, being eventually reinforced by the support and reserve companies, which also filled a gap between the two.

At the same time, immediately south-east of Louverval Wood, two companies of the 12th had advanced, each on a much narrower front (about 400 yards) and each adopting formations somewhat similar to those which they had been practising.<sup>73</sup> The left company, thrusting down the valley between the Louverval and Boursies spurs, quickly came under the same fire that stopped the 10th, and was brought to a stand roughly on the same line, its left in the valley in touch with McCann's right. The right company, under Captain Newland,<sup>74</sup> assembled just north of the Cambrai road, under a bank in the valley, and climbed the Boursies spur beside the road, next to which, screened by the felled trees, Newland personally led the bombers to attack a ruined mill or factory held by the enemy on the northern side of the highway. Ensnconced on the Boursies spur slightly south of the road lay a detached platoon of a third company under Lieutenant Newitt.<sup>75</sup> Its duty was to advance until within sight or under fire from the enemy, to lie quiet there until the first shot was fired by either side, and then, by making the greatest possible racket, to divert the enemy's attention from Newland's company. Covered by this noise, Newland's company traversed half the distance to its objective before the enemy perceived it. The main posts defending the village lay in front, and their machine-guns now opened. A number of the Tasmanians were hit, Lieutenant Sherwin<sup>76</sup>



<sup>73</sup> Each had all four platoons in line. The left company formed three lines—bombers; then, at fifty yards' distance—riflemen and bombers; then, at twenty yards' distance—rifle-grenadiers and Lewis gunners. The right company marched in a line of sections in fours (with about thirty yards' intervals) till clear of shelter, and then extended into two lines, the Lewis gunners and tool carriers being in the second line.

<sup>74</sup> The same who led the attack through Le Barque (*see p. 94*).

<sup>75</sup> Lieut. R. D. Newitt, M.C.; 12th Bn. Tram conductor; of Launceston, Tas., b. Sorell, Tas., 17 Dec., 1893.

<sup>76</sup> Lieut. R. Sherwin, M.C.; 12th Bn. Insurance clerk; of Launceston, Tas.; b. Launceston, 17 June, 1892. Killed in action, 8 April, 1917.

being killed, but with a shout the line charged. By the time the trenches were reached, most of the Germans had run off with their machine-guns.<sup>77</sup> Posts were formed by the 12th at the mill, which lay near the entrance of the village, and in a trench leading north-east from it. The left was bent back along a sunken road to the valley where the left company lay.<sup>78</sup>

A small salient had thus been thrust by the two battalions north of Boursies, and a gap made in the defences of that village, but at a cost of 90 casualties,<sup>79</sup> including some fine young leaders. The defending Germans had merely rushed back to their supports in the next sunken road, which ran northwards half-way through the village. The full objectives had not been gained, and the enemy was left with an opportunity for successful counter-attack such as few commanders would have resisted. Local counter-attacks began at once against the mill, which could be bombed by German parties creeping up the main road. These were largely checked, however, by a post near the roadside, where several tried N.C.O.'s of the 12th—Lance-Corporals Domeney,<sup>80</sup> Whitelaw,<sup>81</sup> and Wickins,<sup>82</sup> and one or two others, under Sergeant Scott<sup>83</sup>—held off the enemy with a Lewis gun. About 8 o'clock there came a shower of bombs from Germans who had accumulated along the roadside. Domeney's leg was shattered as he fired his gun, and the post was driven back to a ruined distillery close behind, where it held on.

Throughout the day a few German field-guns as well as machine-guns kept the area under sharp fire, and at 10 p.m. the post at the mill was heavily bombarded with "pine-apple" bombs from a grenade-thrower, the German equivalent of the Stokes mortar. Immediately afterwards the enemy attacked both along the road and from the north-west, and drove back

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<sup>77</sup> Six of the enemy were made prisoners, but subsequently threw a bomb in an attempt to escape, and were killed.

<sup>78</sup> When Newland, after taking the mill, returned to his headquarters, the posts of his company were under Lieutenant A. A. Heritage and Sergeant J. W. Whittle. Lieutenant W. J. Kelly had been wounded in the advance. (Heritage belonged to Launceston, Tas.; Whittle to Hobart and Launceston; Kelly to Bruce, S. Aust.)

<sup>79</sup> The 10th lost about 40, and the 12th 50.

<sup>80</sup> L/Cpl. E. T. Domeney, M.M. (No. 1514; 12th Bn.). Orchardist; of Flowerpot, Tas.; b. Hobart, 21 April, 1896.

<sup>81</sup> Cpl. I. C. Whitelaw, M.M. (No. 2910; 12th Bn.). Labourer; of Briagolong, Vic.; b. Briagolong, 17th Feb., 1894. Killed in action, 23 April, 1918.

<sup>82</sup> L/Cpl. R. G. Wickins (No. 91, 12th Bn.). Clerk; of Hobart, b. Glebe, Hobart, 14 Aug., 1892. Killed in action, 8 April, 1917.

<sup>83</sup> Sgt. L. G. Scott (No. 366; 12th Bn.). Printer; of West Devonport, Tas.; b. Launceston, Tas., 1893. Killed in action, 9 April, 1917.



most of the advanced Tasmanian posts.<sup>84</sup> South of the road Lieutenant Newitt's platoon, although the Germans were fairly close before it sighted them, swept them with fire from its rifles and machine-gun and, when they fell back, seized the chance to push on and occupy a trench south of the mill. Captain Newland, assisted by Sergeant Whittle, stemmed the retirement of his Tasmanians, Newland appearing at every threatened point, "leading men here, urging men there, arranging for ammunition, directing reinforcements to weak spots, instilling confidence."<sup>85</sup> He was reinforced at his own request by a platoon of one of the support companies under Lieutenant Harrison.<sup>86</sup>

When at 4.15 on April 9th the hour for the main attack upon Boursies arrived, parts of three companies, including this platoon, were able to deliver it; but it was more in the nature of an effort to regain the ground recently retaken by the enemy than of the operation originally planned.<sup>87</sup> The left, moving up the valley, was again brought to a standstill, after it had gone 500 yards, by machine-gun fire from Louverval Spur.<sup>88</sup> The right reoccupied the positions won the day before; but in the centre Lieutenant Dadson,<sup>89</sup> with two platoons under Sergeants Fisher<sup>90</sup> and Talbot,<sup>91</sup> and Lieutenant Harrison reached the German outpost-trenches farther north and captured two machine-guns, which they turned upon the enemy. The village had not been taken, but the Tasmanians were now close upon either side of its western end. Captain Newland and his company, thoroughly worn out, were withdrawn, Lieutenant Newton being sent up to take over the command on the right. Farther north the 10th Battalion

<sup>84</sup> One advanced post, under Corporal P. O. Hay (of Southport, Tas.), though temporarily surrounded, succeeded in withdrawing with its Lewis gun.

<sup>85</sup> For their gallantry in this fight and during the German attack on Lagnicourt on April 15, both these leaders were awarded the Victoria Cross.

<sup>86</sup> Lieut. R. H. Harrison, 12th Bn. Bank clerk, of Launceston, Tas.; b. Launceston, 25 Jan., 1881. Died of wounds, 16 May, 1917.

<sup>87</sup> The operation intended was a descent upon Boursies from the north-east; but the projected starting-line had never been wholly attained, and was now entirely in German hands.

<sup>88</sup> Lieutenant H. F. Uren (of Hobart) was killed in this advance.

<sup>89</sup> Lieut. L. Dadson, M.C., 12th Bn. Farmer; of Bangor, Tas.; b. Sidmouth, Tas., 6 March, 1884.

<sup>90</sup> Sgt. J. F. Fisher (No. 2832; 12th Bn). Draper, of Queenstown, Tas., b. Hobart, 1897.

<sup>91</sup> Sgt. G. F. Talbot (No. 409; 12th Bn). Of Waratah and Burnie, Tas., b. Evandale, Tas., 1895. Died of wounds, 13 April, 1917.

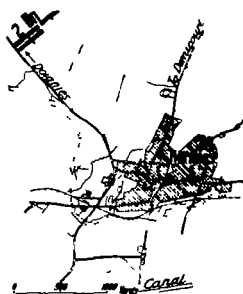
had again advanced its line on the Louverval Spur. The fire was not so severe as on the day before, it being found that the German machine-gun posts had withdrawn 600 yards and were busily firing from their new position into the 12th advancing down the valley. Nevertheless, the 10th again had some 40 men hit.

The feint to cover the assault upon Hermies had thus developed into a stubborn twenty-six hours' fight, in which the 12th Battalion lost 256 killed or wounded (including 7 officers and 15 sergeants), and the 10th 85. The German casualties are unknown, but it is unlikely that they exceeded 100. To justify a feint of this sort, the attack on Hermies must achieve important success.

It was delivered simultaneously with the last effort at Boursies shortly before dawn on April 9th.<sup>92</sup> As in the operation against Doignies, the attacking

**Attack on  
Hermies**

battalion was to descend upon the village from an unexpected direction, the north-west, in rear of the enemy's frontal defences and wire-entanglements. As a preliminary move, shortly after dark the 1st Battalion holding the line beyond Doignies advanced some of its posts 600 to 750 yards east of that village, in order to afford ample room for the assembly of the 2nd, which was charged with carrying out the main attack.



The 2nd was now commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Milligan, one of those young Australian subalterns of good education, keen intelligence, and high character who—like Humphrey Scott and the Howell-Prices—had come from Australia in MacLaurin's original 1st Brigade, and who never failed to obtain a satisfying response from Australian troops. Quiet in voice, gentle in manner, outwardly a little cold, but firm and fair in decision and energetic in action, Milligan closely resembled Owen Howell-Price, and he quickly polished his battalion into a most formidable instrument, keen, loyal,

<sup>92</sup> The hour set was 4.15, but the approach, being over a considerable distance, was to begin at 3.30. The sun would rise at 6.9, but the first sign of dawn would appear shortly after 5 a.m.

united, and bursting with vigour. Like Scott before Louverval, he had explained his plans with extreme care, and, though intricate, they were thoroughly understood. He had been given the option of attacking under a light artillery barrage,<sup>93</sup> but the plan of attack lent itself to surprise, and he preferred to strike silently, the artillery merely continuing its normal rate of fire. The battalion was to have moved astride the Doignies-Hermies road, but, learning shortly before the operation that the German wire was bent back as far as that road, Milligan arranged for his right company to assemble ahead of the one next to it, and to advance along the eastern side of the road until the wire was passed, when it would cross over to the west.

The 2nd Battalion was short of senior officers;<sup>94</sup> but nevertheless, in order to avoid the subsequent loss of efficiency liable to be caused by heavy casualties, Milligan insisted upon keeping a comparatively high proportion of officers out of every attack. Consequently, when at 7.30 p.m. on the 8th the 2nd marched out of Haplincourt, all its companies were commanded by subalterns—the seniors being Lieutenants Robins<sup>95</sup> and Millar<sup>96</sup> of 22 years—and nearly half of its platoons by N.C.O.'s, of whom it had a magnificent roster. Making its way by well-reconnoitred routes, the battalion in the "small hours" lay out in attack formation just beyond Doignies, facing south-east with its right on the Doignies-Hermies road. Its left company, which was echeloned to the left rear, was to move straight to a line east of Hermies, and form there a series of posts entirely cutting off the garrison from escape. The other three would descend direct on the town, the westernmost brushing past the enemy's barbed-wire and attacking from the rear the main entrenchments, the other two moving through the streets and houses. All these three would sweep on until they reached the railway

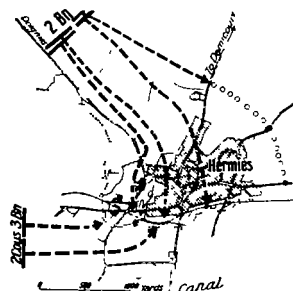
<sup>93</sup> This would have been supported by two 60-pounders and possibly one 8-inch howitzer, which would play upon Demicourt and perhaps upon Hermies. (Sixty-pounders were 5-inch guns, usually employed to fire on enemy batteries, or to sweep the roads in rear of the enemy's line, for which purpose they generally fired shrapnel.)

<sup>94</sup> Most of them were in hospital or convalescent.

<sup>95</sup> Lieut V. W. Robins, 2nd Bn. Accountant; of Pymble, N.S.W.; b. Neutral Bay, N.S.W., 10 Aug., 1894. Killed in action, 9 April, 1917.

<sup>96</sup> Capt. C. K. Millar, M.C.; 2nd Bn. Bank clerk; of Harwood, N.S.W.; b. Harwood, 20 Oct., 1894.

line which skirted the south of the town. This they must on no account cross, since two companies of the 3rd Battalion<sup>97</sup> would be moving against the town from the south-west, where the defence line was strong, and their advance also was to finish on the railway line, reaching it from the opposite direction. When the two battalions closed, every part of the garrison should have been swept up or cut off by the remaining company of the 2nd, which should by then have formed its line of posts east of the village. The three companies of the 2nd from the town would then reinforce that company, while those of the 3rd would continue the line to the canal. Northwards the front would be connected by a company of the 1st Battalion, which would follow the left of the 2nd, stationing one post after another as it proceeded.



*The light dotted line east of town shows posts to be established by left company.*

While the troops were lying out waiting for the hour, 3.30 a.m., at which they were to advance, a flare was fired from some German post in front of the two right companies, and, falling between their lines, lay spluttering in a small heap of straw to which it quickly set fire. An outburst of rifle-shots from the German post showed that the Australians had been detected. Several men were hit, and the company commander, Lieutenant Millar, determined to start the advance at once. Stirring the next company, under Lieutenant Laver, also into motion, he led his waves forward. The Germans in front of the right immediately withdrew. But in front of the left-centre company, then crossing the undulating meadows towards the north of the village, a flare was fired and a fierce fire of rifles and automatic rifles was immediately opened from the summit of a low ridge close ahead. The enemy was evidently a German picquet, which proved to be holding a shallow scrubby bank, 200 yards in length, and which now kept the approach to the rise

<sup>97</sup> The 3rd was now commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel D. T. Moore, also a very young officer—a subaltern at the Landing. He had succeeded Lieutenant-Colonel Owen Howell-Price.



19. BOURSIES

The view is from the direction from which it was attacked by the 12th Battalion,  
9th April, 1917.

*First War Memorial Official Photo No E1303  
Taken on 20th November, 1917*

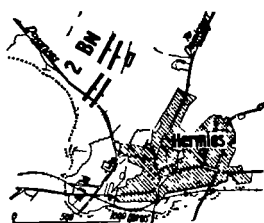
*To face p 240*



20. VIEW FROM THE BRICK YARD AT HERMIES, LOOKING FROM THE GERMAN POSITION DOWN  
THE SLOPE UP WHICH THE RIGHT OF THE 2ND BATTALION  
ATTACKED ON 9TH APRIL, 1917

*And Her Memorial Official Photo No E1876  
Taken on 29th November, 1917*

illuminated by its flares. The company, though losing heavily, continued to advance by rushes of from twenty to fifty yards. Its commander, Lieutenant Robins, had already been killed and both its other officers were now hit, as were both the junior subalterns of the left company, which, under Lieutenant Mann,<sup>98</sup> was following, echeloned some distance behind.<sup>99</sup> As Robins's company came close, the Germans began to bomb. Their heads could now be seen, and word was given to charge. As the Australians made their rush, the Germans ran, and the company charged over the bank and down into the dip beyond, where it was to line up for the attack upon the village. The echeloned company followed, and was reorganised by its commander in the same depression.



It was while Lieutenant Mann, who had no officers left, was telling off the new commanders for his platoons that he observed a cluster of figures on his right, crowded together as if at a street fight. Recognising that it was the left centre company, and seeing that the clustering was very dangerous, he walked over to it, calling for its officers. Learning from one of its sergeants, named Brew,<sup>100</sup> that all the officers had been hit, Mann helped its N.C.O's to reorganise, and then, seeing that they had a good grasp of the plans, left it in charge of Sergeant Brew and went back to his own.

Both companies now lay ready to attack the eastern end of the village. The sky was paling, and the back hedges and ruins could be seen against it, when a distant cheer was heard on the right. Mann decided to wait no longer, and the two companies rushed the hedges and ran through the ruins. A few Germans in the outskirts offered practically no opposition. In the cellars, in spite of the previous sounds of firing,

<sup>98</sup> Capt. G. N. Mann, M.C.; 2nd Bn. Poultry farmer; of Carlingford, N.S.W.; b. Melbourne, 16 May, 1887.

<sup>99</sup> In Robins's company, Lieutenants K. J. Cooper and B. T. Barnes were hit, the former mortally; in Mann's one of the wounded officers was Lieutenant T. B. Smith. (Cooper belonged to Mosman, N.S.W., Barnes to Grafton, N.S.W.; Smith, who was killed in action on 4 Oct., 1917, to North Brighton, Vic. and Appin, N.S.W.)

<sup>100</sup> Lieut. T. Brew, D.C.M.; 2nd Bn. Fellmonger; of Ballarat, Vic.; b. Birkdale, Lancs., Eng., 5 Dec., 1896. Killed in action, 4 Oct., 1917.

men of the garrison were found asleep, or preparing their meal, and were captured by surprise. Mann's company, having swept through an arm of the village, reorganised in a farther dip in the fields beyond. There now being light enough to see, Mann sent his platoons direct towards a line east of the village, where their sections were to form the series of posts enclosing Hermies on the east.

Meanwhile the right of the battalion had advanced with its right flank on the Doignies-Hermies road, just inside the frontal defence-line of the town. The road furnished a sure means of guidance. The end of the bent-back wire-belt just crossed it, and, as the flanking troops approached this point, fire was opened on them. On their returning the shots, this fire ceased, and a number of newly-arrived youngsters, thinking the fight over, raised the cheer which was heard in all parts of the battlefield. Lieutenant Millar's company moved round the eastern end of the wire, and, after passing it, and leaving behind a supposedly empty trench from which the fire had come, turned half-right, and, crossing the road, moved straight towards the main defences of Hermies, taking them in rear.

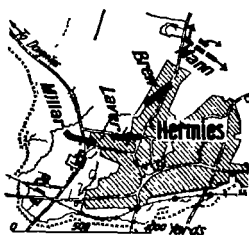
The flank was reaching the low hill on which lay the western outskirts, when much shouting from that direction, and the firing of flares and rockets, showed that the alarm had been given. A burst of machine-gun and automatic-rifle fire caught Millar's company at the foot of the hill, and men fell on all sides. By breaking into a rush the company succeeded in advancing some way up the slope, but then flung itself down in face of a too deadly fire. The voices of the N.C.O's could be heard coolly controlling their men—"Up a little on the right!" "Ease off to the left!"—but the German positions were so difficult to locate, and the fire sweeping the crest so furious, that further advance seemed hopeless. Add to this that part of the garrison of the Hermies defences on the extreme right, cut off by the attack, now faced to its rear and fired into the Australian flank. Shots also came from some of the enemy who had feigned death and been passed on the slope; these were quickly suppressed.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Some were killed and two made prisoners.



But the opposition ahead was insuperable. A machine-gun, whose position could not be ascertained, was enfilading the crest from the right; against the sky, now showing the first grey of dawn, could be seen the dust whipped out of the ground by the stream of its bullets. A corporal named Keith<sup>102</sup> kept his Lewis gun playing to the right, although fire was turned on him again and again and he was shot through the ankle. In an endeavour to locate the enemy ahead, Lieutenant Paterson<sup>103</sup> and Sergeant Murphy<sup>104</sup> crept up the slope, two of their most trusted bombers, Lance-Corporals Swane<sup>105</sup> and White,<sup>106</sup> firing rifle-grenades over the crest meanwhile. Paterson, lifting his head, was immediately killed. Word reached Murphy, who was now in charge of the flank, that the stretcher-bearers, working behind the line, were being shot at from the rear! A party sent back under Lance-Corporal Armstrong<sup>107</sup> quickly ascertained that this fire came from the trench which had been passed for empty, and, attacking it, made prisoners of 30 Germans. Meanwhile White and Swane continued to bomb the German position. For an hour and a half the company lay out on the hill, fighting most stubbornly, but its position caused intense anxiety to both company and battalion commanders, for, when the light increased, nothing could save it from being shot to pieces by Germans who could command the slope. Millar, who was in touch by telephone with Colonel Milligan, had resolved to rush the position as soon as there was light enough to judge where the opposition lay, when suddenly the fire from the Germans ceased. Millar's company advanced over the crest without another shot directed at it, and found itself looking down into a large sunken



<sup>102</sup> Cpl. T. M. Keith, D.C.M. (No. 187; 2nd Bn.). Railway goods porter; of Stanmore, N.S.W.; b. Carradore, Donaghadee, Co. Down, Ireland, 1890.

<sup>103</sup> Lieut. M. Paterson, 2nd Bn. Clerk; of Lakemba, N.S.W.; b. Ashfield, N.S.W., 20 July, 1893. Killed in action, 9 April, 1917.

<sup>104</sup> Coy. Sgt.-Major J. Murphy, M.M. (No. 2002; 2nd Bn.). Fisherman; of Brighton-le-Sands, N.S.W.; b. Liverpool, Eng., 27 Jan., 1889.

<sup>105</sup> L/Cpl. B. H. Swane (No. 1835; 2nd Bn.). Insurance clerk, of Neutral Bay, N.S.W.; b. Newport, Isle of Wight, Eng., 1896. Died of wounds, 23 May, 1917.

<sup>106</sup> Cpl. H. White (No. 1439; 2nd Bn.). Farm hand; of Bexley, N.S.W.; b. Sheffield, Eng., 3 Jan., 1893.

<sup>107</sup> Coy. Q.M.S. N. L. Armstrong (No. 4336; 2nd Bn.). Joiner, of Arachliffe, N.S.W.; b. Annandale, N.S.W., 9 March, 1894.

brickfield, with sheer banks of clay and sand, which, together with a sunken road leading from its farther side to the railway station, had been held by the enemy as a strong-post.

The reason for the sudden collapse of the opposing Germans was that fire had been turned on their rear by Lieutenant Laver's company, which had formed the right-centre of the 2nd Battalion's attacking line. This had escaped the fierce fire encountered by those on both its flanks, and its two leading platoons, under Lieutenants Donaldson<sup>108</sup> and Paviour,<sup>109</sup> had pushed on boldly, passing a small German outpost, which was afterwards cleared by the rear platoon, and entering the town. Laver held the remainder of his company on the outskirts until day began to break, and meanwhile explained to his men their task of assisting Millar's company, and allotted to Company Sergeant-Major Maddigan<sup>110</sup> the duty of bombing the Germans along the railway. Then, at the same time as the company under Sergeant Brew on his left, he advanced into Hermies. The buildings had been demolished by the Germans, but

all kinds of things barred our passage (wrote a man of the 2nd<sup>111</sup> afterwards). Over ruins, piles of bricks, broken fences, and barbed-wire and hedges, we scrambled until we reached our destination. By this time it was break of day, and we were hardly on the other side of the village before the sound of German rifles and machine-guns was heard, for we had reached one of their strong-posts. . . . Some of our brave chaps fell at this stage.

The Germans in the brickfield retired straight into the hands of Donaldson, who captured 70, including some of those dislodged by Maddigan.

The collapse had been assisted by the advance of the two companies of the 3rd Battalion against the south-west corner of the town.<sup>112</sup> Their duty was to approach the place frontally and hold the enemy while the 2nd attacked it from flank and rear. The 3rd assembled nearer to the town than the 2nd, and began their advance at 3.45, moving in two

<sup>108</sup> Lieut. K. R. Donaldson, 2nd Bn. Surveyor's assistant; of Broken Hill, N.S.W.; b. Hay, N.S.W., 18 June, 1895.

<sup>109</sup> Lieut. S. R. Paviour, 2nd Bn. Railway porter; of Hinton, N.S.W.; b. Morpeth, N.S.W., 1891.

<sup>110</sup> C.S.M. C. C. Maddigan, M.M. (No. 534; 2nd Bn.). Tram conductor; of Sydney, b. Ultimo, N.S.W., 9 April, 1890.

<sup>111</sup> Pte. R. G. Treseder (No. 3644; 2nd Bn.). Warehouseman; of Waverley, N.S.W.; b. Waverley, 13 May, 1894.

<sup>112</sup> During this attack the 60th Machine Gun Company, 20th (British) Division, farther south, maintained fire upon Havrincourt Wood, which was held by enemy machine-gun posts. British artillery also fired upon the wood.

waves, widely extended. These were fired on at once by machine-guns, but advanced until their left flank was within 200 yards of the railway station, where it was held up, its leading officer, Lieutenant McMaster,<sup>113</sup> being riddled with machine-gun bullets close to the German wire, and its leader in the second wave, Lieutenant MacDougal,<sup>114</sup> wounded. The other flank, however, continued to edge forward, and made its way through the entanglement. A German machine-gun on the right was captured through the action of Corporal Ewart,<sup>115</sup> who made his way into the road from which it was firing, and from the flank shot down and bombed the crew. The extreme right flank, under Sergeant P. Kinchington, though far separated, had seized a German bridge-head on the canal bank.<sup>116</sup> With its right thus made safe, about 5.30 the rest of the 3rd reached the railway line. Shortly afterwards the resistance of the enemy on the left collapsed, as it had done in front of the 2nd, and through the same cause, and the 3rd, capturing another machine-gun, joined the 2nd on the railway line. Large numbers of Germans having come out of the town and surrendered, the troops on the railway line now moved towards the final stations which were to be taken up in the open fields to the east.

It was to this line that Lieutenant Mann of the encircling company had already directed his platoons at daybreak. Most of them had reached it,<sup>117</sup> and stationed their sections at intervals along it. But one platoon, when approaching a smooth crest traversed by the Hermies-Graincourt road,

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<sup>113</sup> Lieut. A. S. McMaster, 3rd Bn. Bootmaker; of Adamstown, N.S.W.; b. Tingha, N.S.W., 24 Feb., 1895. Killed in action, 9 April, 1917.

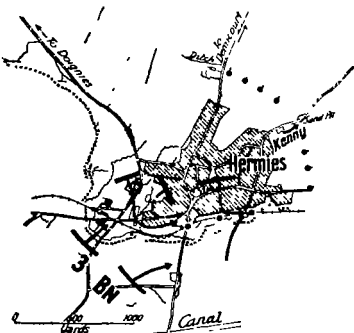
<sup>114</sup> Lieut. G. R. MacDougal, 3rd Bn. Bank official; of Bondi, N.S.W.; b. Bathurst, N.S.W., 20 March, 1889. Died, 22 Jan., 1930.

<sup>115</sup> L/Sgt. L. A. Ewart, D.C.M. (No. 2451; 3rd Bn.). Fireman; of Young, N.S.W.; b. Carlton, Vic., 1892.

<sup>116</sup> Cpl. W. C. Tilbrook, reaching the road from Hermies to the canal, had his foot shot off by the machine-gun in this post. Crawling on his knee, he then fired at the gun from fifteen yards, but it caught and killed him; but Kinchington with Pte N. Lee, covered by a Lewis gun, quickly captured gun and crew. Kinchington's post, who thought the main attack had failed, were surprised to see Australians (under their commander, Lieut. E. R. Shelley) in Hermies. (Kinchington belonged to Waverley, N.S.W.; Tilbrook to Kempsey, N.S.W.; Lee, who was killed on 22 June, 1918, to Penshurst, Vic.; Shelley to Henley, N.S.W.).

<sup>117</sup> In this company Corporal H. J. Murray (of Lilyfield, N.S.W.), whose platoon officer and sergeant had been hit, bombed and took a German trench near the railway. Sergeants I. G. Grinlinton (of Sydney, killed in action on 6 Nov., 1917) and S. N. Telfer also held sectors near the railway, Telfer having routed out a German post. Another sector was held by C.S.M. T. D. Brown (of Sydney).

north-east of the village, was heavily fired on by an automatic rifle from the direction of the road, which was here sunken and bordered by a sandpit. The impression of some of the platoon was that they had lost their way, but the bombing section, led by two N.C.O's,<sup>118</sup> recognised against the sky-line three trees which Lieutenant Mann had pointed out to them on an aeroplane photograph as their objective. On their own initiative the eight bombers crossed the road to a small cemetery on the flank of the Germans, and, taking cover behind some manure-heaps on its outskirts, endeavoured by fire to cover the further advance of some of their members. Private Brayshaw<sup>119</sup> crawled towards the trees and shot a German sharpshooter, but was himself wounded. One of the N.C.O's having also been wounded, his friend, a tall spare Irish-Australian, Bede Kenny,<sup>120</sup> asked two mates for covering fire, and then rushed over the intervening hundred yards to the trees, threw bombs into the sandpit, and entered it alone. The line of posts was then completed.<sup>121</sup>



The three companies from the village now reinforced these posts, driving towards them a few Germans who here or there opposed them.<sup>122</sup> South-east of the village some German machine-gun posts still held out, and the line of the 3rd Battalion could not, until after dark, advance so far as

<sup>118</sup> Sergeant A. R. McPhee (of Manly, N.S.W.) and Corporal E. G. McNeill (of Balmain, N.S.W.). It was McNeill who was wounded in this attack.

<sup>119</sup> L/Cpl. C. A. Brayshaw (No. 4433; 2nd Bn.). Labourer; of Bredbo, N.S.W.; b. Bolero, N.S.W., 14 June, 1888. Killed in action, 4 May, 1917.

<sup>120</sup> Cpl. T. J. B. Kenny, V.C. (No. 4195; 2nd Bn.). Chemist's assistant; of Bondi, N.S.W.; b. Paddington, N.S.W., 29 Sept., 1896.

<sup>121</sup> For this action, he was awarded the Victoria Cross. Kenny was an exceptionally powerful bomber, and at the request of his corporal had endeavoured to throw a bomb to the trees. It fell, however, half-way.

<sup>122</sup> Fire was at first met by these companies as they came down the main street, but was avoided by the men keeping close to the ruins at the roadside. The German artillery soon began to shell the troops where they were visible. Lieutenant Millar's headquarters was hit, and a noted bomber of the battalion, Corporal H. E. Wyatt (of Surry Hills, N.S.W.), who lay there wounded, was mortally hurt

that of the 2nd.<sup>123</sup> During the day the Germans constantly endeavoured to ascertain the position of the Australian posts, boldly exposing themselves with the object of drawing rifle-fire, but this was withheld, and consequently the posts escaped bombardment.

So ended a completely successful action. Except for a few of the garrison who escaped through the gap left for a time at the sandpit, all the Germans in Hermies were killed or captured; over 200 prisoners were taken at a loss of 253 officers and men to the battalions engaged.<sup>124</sup> The stiff nature of the fighting is indicated by the fact that on the Australian side the proportion of killed was over one in three.

Hermies had been captured and cleared by 6 a.m.<sup>125</sup> At the same hour the 12th Battalion—incorrectly, as it turned out—had reported that it had captured Boursies and established posts on each side of it. It still remained for the enemy to fulfil expectations by evacuating Demicourt. At 6.10 the commander of the company of the 1st Battalion which lay opposite that village, telephoned to Lieutenant-Colonel Stacy, his battalion commander, that he believed the Germans had withdrawn. Stacy passed the report to his brigadier, and at once ordered his three front-line companies to send out patrols as close to Demicourt as possible, and at the same time warned the company commanders that an order to

<sup>123</sup> Sergeant Murphy's platoon of the 2nd was troubled during the day by fire from a German outpost south of the railway. Eventually the same two bombers, Swane and White, who had attacked the brickfield, covered by fire of a Lewis gunner, Private G. J. Kearney (of Paddington, N.S.W.), drove from it with rifle-grenades a platoon of Germans. After dark the 3rd Battalion advanced its line to this position.

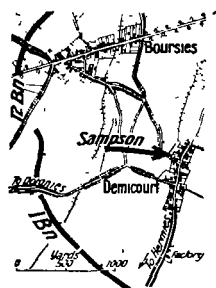
<sup>124</sup> The 2nd Battalion lost 8 officers and 173 others, the 3rd Battalion 2 and 70.

<sup>125</sup> A building on the small park in the centre of the town appeared suitable for headquarters, and that of the 2nd Battalion might have moved there had not a German prisoner, detained near the spot, made it clear that the place was mined. Some days later a mine containing (according to a German diary captured on April 15) 34 tons of explosive blew up there, turning the park into a huge crater. Headquarters having remained in the brickyard, no one was injured.

I Anzac had warned the troops that buildings elsewhere had been destroyed by delayed mines. The single mean cottage which the enemy had left standing in Beugnâtre, and which had been used successively as headquarters of brigades and battalions, was blown up on March 29, and an officer and three men of the 14th Battalion (whose headquarters it then was) were killed. This had recalled attention to the order already given, that such places must be avoided. Other delayed mines exploded on March 26 at Sapignies (in the area of the 7th Division) under the church, on the 30th at Favreuil, blowing up two unoccupied dugouts, and at Vaulx-Vraucourt, blowing up two wells and damaging the roadside; on April 3 at Lebuquière, destroying an unoccupied house; and on April 18 under the railway station at Vélizy. This killed the quartermaster (Lieut. W. A. Symington, of Ganmain, N.S.W.) and 8 others of the 4th Battalion, wounded 9, and destroyed the battalion's Australian mail.

occupy the village would probably follow. The patrols were forthwith despatched, and one of them, consisting of twenty-four men from the left company under Lieutenant Sampson,<sup>120</sup> in spite of fire from a German machine-gun in Boursies, succeeded in working forward from cover to cover. Dropping nine of his men on the spur north-west of Demicourt to suppress the enemy by their fire, Sampson continued to advance with the remainder. There were still Germans in the village, but about 8 o'clock, as he approached it, Sampson perceived that they were retiring, and, dividing his party into two, rushed the place. Not long afterwards the enemy attempted to return, but Sampson's patrol, firing from a bank, drove them back.

Meanwhile Brigadier-General Lesslie, on receipt of Colonel Stacy's message reporting the supposed evacuation of the village, had given the formal order for it to be occupied. But the telephone wire to Stacy's front-line companies had by then been cut, and it was not until 7.45 that they received the order to advance in strength. The movement was to begin at 8 o'clock, the flank companies advancing to right and left of the village respectively, the centre company engaging it while they were drawing round. About this time the left company reported that the place had not been evacuated by the enemy as the order implied. Colonel Stacy accordingly asked the supporting artillery to shell Demicourt from 8 to 8.5. It was about this time that Sampson's patrol was nearing the village, and it seems probable that it was this shelling and the sight of the advancing companies that caused the enemy to withdraw from the actual village. They were still, however, on its right and left, and, when the flanking companies drew level with it, they were fired on by machine-guns not far from the north-eastern and southern outskirts, and by field-guns. The companies, which had adopted the formations recently practised—methods more suitable for close fighting than for warfare in the open—were driven back to their starting-points.



<sup>120</sup> Lieut. R. W. Sampson, M.C.; 1st Bn. Bookkeeper, of Leichhardt, N.S.W.; b. Darlinghurst, N.S.W., 14 Jan., 1886.

Their patrols, however, had continued at work; Sampson, having entered the village, held on there and at 9.30 was joined by a party from the right company. Shortly afterwards another patrol of the right company occupied the sugar factory on the Demicourt-Hermies road, from which the advance had previously been fired on. The three companies were sent forward again,<sup>127</sup> and by noon the 1st Battalion<sup>128</sup> was digging a line of posts beyond the village. Germans being still in Boursies, that flank was strengthened by Vickers machine-guns. At noon, however, patrols of the 12th Battalion sent into Boursies discovered that the enemy had gone. Lieutenant Newitt advanced his post south of the village, and a platoon was stationed near its eastern end.<sup>129</sup>

The capture of Demicourt had cost the 1st Battalion 55 casualties.<sup>130</sup> The total loss in the three operations was thus:

Boursies (10th and 12th Battalions)	..	341
Demicourt (1st Battalion)	.. ..	55
Hermies (2nd and 3rd Battalions)	.. ..	253
		<hr/>
		649

The Germans, like their opponents, were now holding their front as in trench-warfare, the outposts in front of the Hindenburg Line being supplied not by a special rear-guard, but by whatever battalion occupied the Hindenburg Line immediately in rear. Thus the three regiments of the 38th Division, holding the main line 2,000 yards east of Boursies and Demicourt, had provided the outposts west of those villages, Boursies, on the front of the 95th I.R., being defended by a company of its I Battalion, and Demicourt, in front of the 94th, by a company of its II Battalion. Hermies came within the boundary of the next division on the south, the 4th Ersatz, and was held by the III/362nd I.R., with the 4th Machine-Gun Company of that regiment, reinforced by three sections of the 1st Musketeer Battalion armed with automatic rifles. The report of the fighting sent in by the IX German Corps states that the first attack on Boursies, made "after strong artillery preparation,"<sup>131</sup> had been repelled, but that on being

<sup>127</sup> This time at least one of them adopted artillery formation with a view to avoiding loss by shell-fire.

<sup>128</sup> Its fourth company was still in reserve.

<sup>129</sup> By Lieutenants L. M. Newton and O. J. Roper, of the 12th.

<sup>130</sup> Lieutenant A. R. Cassidy (of Leichhardt, N.S.W.) was killed.

<sup>131</sup> This must refer to the shelling of the villages on previous days, since none of the attacks, except that on Demicourt, was immediately preceded by artillery fire.

repeated the attack against Boursies and Hermies succeeded. As this reverse was accompanied by a loss of over 50 killed, 100 wounded, and 240 missing, the corps ordered the withdrawal of its line to the hills east of Boursies, Demicourt, and Hermies. Apparently before this order had been carried out, the Australians captured Demicourt; and south of the Canal du Nord the XV British Corps, during the afternoon, thrust through Havrincourt Wood. These blows were locally decisive—at nightfall the 38th Division (opposite the 1st Australian) and the 4th Ersatz Division (opposite the right of the XV Corps) withdrew their rear-guards behind the Hindenburg Line, leaving only smaller posts in the open ground before it.

By successive local advances made at night without serious opposition, the I Anzac line was during the next few nights pushed forward to within less than a mile of the Hindenburg defences.

With the British front line at last stationary, facing that of the enemy, the three weeks' "war of movement" ended.

**The "open" phase ends** There is no question that the I Anzac Corps had played in it an especially vigorous part. In telegraphing his congratulations to the 1st Australian Division on April 9th, General Gough added:

Throughout the advance since the end of February the enterprise, tactical skill, and gallantry of the whole Anzac Corps has been remarkable and is deserving of the highest commendation.

This short experience of moving warfare had indeed been of the greatest interest and value both to commanders and troops. They had definitely cast off the methods and "complexes" of trench-warfare. In the first place the advanced guards, moving against a scattered enemy screen, had been able to practise the traditional system of feeling for the flanks of his weak detachments and advancing "by bounds." When the advanced guards came up against the string of villages forming the outpost-line held by the enemy's rear-guard, these tactics were out of the question, and the second phase of the advance began.

In this, the capture of each village or set of villages had furnished a problem, solved in most cases by the employment of unexpected methods, sometimes with moderate artillery support, at other times without it. The plan adopted was



usually that of moving past the village and enclosing as well as attacking it. At Lagnicourt, Louverval, and in the second attack on Noreuil, the attempt at encirclement had been made by thrusting past both sides of the place, while at the same time attacking it. At Doignies and Hermies the main thrust had been made from a flank, in rear of the enemy's frontal defences. In the first attack on Noreuil, Gellibrand had intended to enclose the village first and to clear it later.<sup>132</sup> At Lagnicourt and Hermies, where the envelopment proceeded more swiftly than the attack on the village, a great part of the garrison—at Hermies, nearly the whole of it—was captured. At Doignies, if the later companies of the 55th had moved, as had been intended, by the east and not the west of the village, a similar capture might have resulted.

On the other hand, encirclement in April 1917 did not necessarily bring the same results as in 1918. The spirit of the German troops, especially after the short rest afforded by the withdrawal, was in many units equal to that of their keenest opponents, and it was quite unsafe to assume that any detachment of them which found their opponents in its rear would lose its head and throw up the fight. Todd's company of the 50th Battalion, after stationing itself well in rear of the garrison of Noreuil, had itself been surrounded by the Württembergers and been captured. Only by elaborate planning, timing, and assurance both of supply and of support on the flanks could the cutting out of a section of the enemy's main outpost-line be wisely attempted.<sup>133</sup> These conditions were now, however, coming within range of attainment both of the Australian troops and of their staff. It is significant that, of important operations, the attack upon Hermies was the first, within the experience of Australian infantry, to develop from start to finish almost precisely in accordance with plan.

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<sup>132</sup> This was suggested also by Elliott for the capture of Louverval and Doignies. The policy of folding his flanks around the enemy, as if embracing him, had been tested by Elliott—but against much slighter forces—at Frémicourt and Beaumetz in the first phase of the advance. It was employed by the British in the second phase at Croisilles, and succeeded. A year later it was employed at the recapture of Villers-Bretonneux.

<sup>133</sup> It is difficult, for example, to believe that Gellibrand's hastily planned attempt upon Noreuil could have achieved success. It was made, however, under the impression that higher authorities desired the risk to be run, and that the village was held by a handful of men.

## CHAPTER VIII

### ARRAS, AND THE GENESIS OF THE BULLECOURT PLAN

WHEN on March 17th the Germans withdrew their front from the salient between Arras and the Aisne, the rôle so long projected for the Fifth Army in the spring offensive had become impossible of performance. Its intended attack, originally a main stroke in the Allies' thrust on the Somme, had been reduced, under Nivelle's plan, to an important precursor of the British feint at Arras. When the Germans on February 22nd made their preliminary withdrawal, the prospect of General Gough being able to strike at all began to vanish by reason of the voluntary abandonment by the enemy of the points to be attacked. By timely retirements the enemy thrice placed himself out of range of a blow about to be delivered.<sup>1</sup> The final withdrawal had been so timed as to render it difficult for the Fifth Army—and even the right of the Third—to follow it up and come into effective action again before the commencement of the spring offensive.

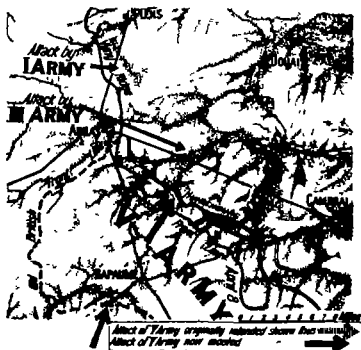
Time, however, was the enemy's sole gain, so far as this particular stroke was concerned.<sup>2</sup> His flank, running back at a sharp angle from the Arras front, would still offer a most tempting objective for a powerful stroke. The Fifth Army, when it came up against the Hindenburg Line, would be well to the left rear of the German front at Arras, and only eight miles distant. The Third Army's attack, if successful, would sweep across Gough's front, and a blow delivered by him—if one were permitted by the time available and the strength of his artillery—would be more

<sup>1</sup> By the withdrawals on February 22, March 12, and March 17; the enemy had not eluded the stroke of the II Corps at Pys on February 17, which started the premature retirement, or that of I Anzac at Malt Trench (March 2).

<sup>2</sup> The enemy had of course attained his main object, the accumulation of reserves by shortening the line.

dangerous to the Germans facing the main thrust, than would have been the attack originally planned farther south. It was no longer a case of a feint—to attract German reserves so close to the point of the main attack would be worse than useless. The object would be to threaten the rear and flank of an enemy already fighting for his life, and the most effective time for striking would be simultaneous with the main attack or shortly after.

Such an operation could, however, only be considered if Gough's army could reach the Hindenburg Line in time to allow thorough preparation, and if it was furnished with sufficient artillery and ammunition for that purpose. The wire entanglement of the Hindenburg Line was known to be the most formidable ever constructed: aeroplane photographs showed its broad belts, three deep, the last of them fifty yards out from the first trench, and a single strong belt before the second trench. The front wire was in many places triangular, so that machine-guns could fire along its edges, and an attack would split and lose direction.<sup>3</sup> The wire alone—not to speak of the two well-dug trenches 150 or 200 yards apart, would require protracted bombardment; and to any close reader of the records of this period it is evident that the sufficiency of time, guns, and ammunition was from the first so uncertain that G.H.Q. regarded the possibility of any stroke by the Fifth Army as doubtful, and tended to counter the German retirement by the alternative policy of withdrawing troops and guns from Gough's front and employing them to strengthen the main offensive elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> Except for a natural desire to assist the Third Army if opportunity arose, Gough



<sup>3</sup> See Vol. XII, plates 311-2. The trenches were also reputed to have numerous concrete emplacements and tunnels; and it was known that in some parts range marks had been placed on the ground in front of them.

<sup>4</sup> By this means Haig also obtained reserves which could, if necessary, be used in repelling the German offensive anticipated by him, though on insufficient grounds, in Flanders.

himself seems for the time being to have had no intention of proposing an attack; and when on March 11th General Allenby of the Third Army wrote:

The Fifth Army, although at first not in a condition to assume a vigorous offensive, will probably be in touch with the Germans in front of the Hindenburg Line, so that we may expect help on our right flank as we advance with our right on the Hindenburg Line

someone at G.H.Q. noted in the margin:

Fifth Army may be weak.

On the following day at a conference with his army commanders Haig decided that, if the offensive was to take place, as intended, on April 8, it would be necessary to concentrate "all possible resources on the First and Third Armies." On March 16th the Fifth Army was directed to transfer to the First its XIII Corps with three divisions; the transfer of the II Corps had already been ordered, leaving Gough with only two army corps, the V and I Anzac.

On the other hand the importance of the Fifth Army's prospective position close on the flank of the offensive was much too evident to be ignored, and in the anticipatory arrangements made on March 16th for following up the German withdrawal<sup>6</sup> Gough was directed to co-operate closely with the right of the Third and to establish his heavy artillery as soon as possible on the line Beugny-Mory-Hamelincourt<sup>6</sup> "so as to bring the German defences of the Hindenburg Line under fire from the south." It was estimated<sup>7</sup> that fifteen siege batteries would suffice the Fifth Army for merely following the retreat, but Haig on March 18th allowed Gough to retain another twenty for assisting the offensive of the Third Army conditionally upon his proving that he could do so by fire from the south. He was to keep G.H.Q. informed as to the dates when these twenty batteries were advanced within range of the Hindenburg Line, and as to the manner in which they could support the main attack.<sup>8</sup>

On the day following this decision Gough himself visited the forward area. No one loved such an excursion more than he. His heart was out in advance with the cavalry screen,

<sup>6</sup> See p. 149.

<sup>6</sup> See sketch on opposite page.

<sup>7</sup> On March 18, when the final withdrawal had occurred.

<sup>8</sup> G.H.Q. would then judge whether they could be more profitably employed in the Fifth Army or elsewhere

and, had he commanded one of its squadrons, his impetuous, energetic spirit would have gloried in seizing each chance of pressing and outwitting the enemy's rear-guard detachments. He believed strongly in personal reconnaissance, and in pushing all headquarters far enough forward to permit of it.<sup>9</sup> Such visits were all to the good in informing the commander and keeping subordinates up to their tasks.<sup>10</sup> Gough's siege batteries, other than those specially retained, were now leaving for the Arras front,<sup>11</sup> but the Hindenburg Line was already within extreme range, and during this visit he resolved that the bombardment must begin at once. He forthwith ordered the II Corps to bring forward its six-inch howitzers and sixty-pounders to Sapignies "and commence bombardment of the Hindenburg Line or any other points where action is required by the cavalry." Early in the night a similar order was also given to I Anzac. Each battery on reaching position was, as its first action, to fire four rounds into the Hindenburg Line.

Unfortunately, although the I Anzac Corps was warned in good time that these guns would move *viâ* Bapaume, the corps staff does not appear to have informed its branch responsible for maintaining the roads. Its engineers and pioneers had by March 18th succeeded in rendering the Albert-Bapaume road fit for horse-transport; light cars and motor lorries with material for road repair were also permitted to travel on it. But, though the road was wide, the paved strip was narrow,<sup>12</sup>



<sup>9</sup> Not long after this, Gough decided to advance part of his army headquarters to Frémicourt. The huts, however, were seen before completion and were destroyed by the German artillery.

<sup>10</sup> Their advantages were overwhelming, but they involved two risks—first, that the commander, if unduly exposing himself, might be hit and so temporarily dislocate the command; second, that he might tend to attach undue importance to what he saw. For example, when thrilled by the rare glimpse of some distant party of the enemy, he was usually inclined to question why this party was not instantly fired on, and even himself to call up the artillery, which might be resting after prolonged engagement of more important targets or intent on some other task. Even, however, if occasionally misdirected, such goading was usually beneficial.

<sup>11</sup> This day 37 heavy batteries were ordered north. Another 24 had been ordered away on March 15.

<sup>12</sup> On March 18 the commander of the 1st Aust. Div. Ammunition Sub-Park inspected the road and noted that it was in fair order, but "very narrow for double traffic."

and, if heavy vehicles were to use it, strict traffic-control would be needed. Now, on the evening of the 19th, without warning to the Anzac police staff, ponderous "caterpillars," with lumbering heavy artillery in tow, began to turn on to the already crowded highway. The scene that followed is vividly described in the diary of an Australian.

After passing the last big crater near Le Sars (about 6.30 p.m.) we ran into a block. It had been half-raining and half-snowing, and the road was slush. A big lorry had stuck and its wheels dug in. Two light cars had tried to pass it and each stuck in the soft roadside. A tractor-caterpillar bringing down a big gun came down and pulled the lorry out, and the two cars, and then on the way back got stuck himself. Another caterpillar with a big gun broke down on the other side of the road a few yards from him. A signal lorry broke down further up. Officer<sup>13</sup> of 2nd Divisional Headquarters and I worked for three hours getting the traffic gradually along. Then a traffic officer<sup>14</sup> came and took charge. The traffic-control men<sup>15</sup> tried to keep the traffic in single streams and let it through in blocks, and for a bit they succeeded. But there were not enough of them, and, while they were elsewhere, it double-banked . . . There was a thin trickle of infantry, relieved, trickling slowly down through the block. . . . A solid block of men, horse-waggons, led horses, big lorries, tractors, and heavy guns for three-quarters of a mile.<sup>16</sup>

It took over nine hours for a vehicle to pass this block, which continued until the following afternoon. Some of the heavy artillery then on the move was two days in reaching Bapaume, but two half-batteries<sup>17</sup> were emplaced on March 20th behind Saignies and Beugnâtre, and duly fired at the sector of the Hindenburg Line around the projecting village of Bullecourt, the only part of it within range. The Albert-Bapaume road was forthwith closed each night to all traffic except that of guns and road material. Nearly a week was to pass before the bulk of the artillery reached Bapaume.

The Germans noted shells falling in Bullecourt that day. The historian of the 121st (Württemberg) R.I.R. says:—"The beautiful days (of quiet) did not last long. Already on March 19 the patrols

<sup>13</sup> Major F. K. Officer, O.B.E., M.C. D.A.A.G., Aust. Corps, 1917/19. Barrister-at-law; of Melbourne; b. Toorak, Vic., 2 Oct., 1889.

<sup>14</sup> Lieut.-Col. S. Bruggy, D.S.O., O.B.E. D.A.A. & Q.M.G., 2nd Aust. Div., 1916/17; A.A.G., Admin. H.Q., A.I.F., 1917/18. Officer of Aust. Permanent Forces; of Sydney; b. Lismore, N.S.W., 25 Nov., 1876. Died, 21 Aug., 1929.

<sup>15</sup> The diary states: "The Australian police were big, fine, capable men."

<sup>16</sup> Similar blocks occurred on March, 18, 19, and 20 on the roads in rear of the French army (G.A.N.) following the Germans. The trouble there also was caused by the rush of heavy tractors and motor lorries on to the roads. So serious were the blocks that the supply of ammunition and food became endangered. The moral drawn by the French was that in case of a swift advance it was best to push forward only a few heavy horse-drawn guns with a large supply of ammunition. It was also concluded that tractor-drawn guns were unsuitable for such conditions, and the tractor-drawn heavy artillery was consequently sent elsewhere.

<sup>17</sup> The 115th and 122nd Batteries of the II Corps, transferred the same day to I Anzac.

had brushes with the English reconnoitring cavalry at Croisilles, and on March 20 the first 12-cm. shells<sup>18</sup> fell in Bullecourt. They came from a long distance, slowly buzzing down. They were not very seriously regarded, and the troops did not allow themselves to be disturbed by them. . . . The position was first properly bombarded on March 26." That the disappointment was probably keener than this writer would admit is indicated by the historian of a sister regiment—180th I.R. "We had hoped," he says, "to have long rest from the enemy so that at least we could prepare the construction of the Hindenburg Line in a co-ordinated manner, but as early as March 20 the points occupied by our outposts beyond the Hindenburg Line received artillery-fire,<sup>19</sup> and on March 25 the enemy bombarded the west part of Bullecourt . . . and also right into the Hindenburg Line. The Englishman had followed us quicker than we expected with his artillery and transport."

Meanwhile General Gough had arrived at the decision to assist the Third Army, if possible, not merely by the use of artillery, but by attacking with infantry part of the Hindenburg Line in the left rear of the resisting enemy. On the 20th, calling his two corps commanders and their chiefs-of-staff to a conference, he set before them his project, the capture of the string of "rear-guard" villages being a necessary preliminary. The most suitable point for attacking the Hindenburg Line, he stated, was near Quéant, a village lying 500 yards in front of the Hindenburg Line at its junction with the Drocourt-Quéant "switch."<sup>20</sup> It was upon this switch that the Germans would probably fall back if Allenby broke through at Arras, and the capture of the junction would greatly imperil them. At the same time Gough explained that it was still too early to determine the point of attack, this being dependent rather upon Allenby's desire.

It will be remembered that at this stage G.H.Q. suffered some anxiety by reason of reported indications that the Germans, who so far had shown no sign of an intention to avoid the



<sup>18</sup> *History of 121st R.I.R.*, p. 46. Probably 4.5-inch howitzer shells are meant. The shells fired by the batteries at Saignies were heavier, but may be the ones referred to.

<sup>19</sup> *History of 180th I.R.*, pp. 77-8. In this case the reference is also to the fire of the field artillery.

<sup>20</sup> Drocourt is near Lens. The switch was known to the Germans as the "Wotan Line."

main Arras-Vimy thrust, might be extending their withdrawal to that sector and falling back beyond the Hindenburg Line.<sup>21</sup> Gough's impulsive tendency to believe the enemy beaten rendered him an easy victim to this suspicion, which was not weakened by the stubborn resistance of the Germans on March 19th and 20th in Noreuil, Ecoust, and Croisilles, and which possibly lessened his respect for the apparent strength of the Hindenburg defences. On the 22nd he ordered that as soon as the enemy was driven from those villages preparations for assaulting the Hindenburg Line should begin. An order for such an operation "between Quéant and Ecoust" was issued by G.H.Q. next day. It further directed Gough to assist with artillery the right of the Third Army as far as "the difficulties of bringing forward heavy and siege batteries" allowed. On the 24th at a conference at G.H.Q. Gough again stated his belief that Germans were occupying the Hindenburg Line merely as a rear-guard position, and affirmed his readiness to attack it with two divisions on a front of from 3,000 to 4,000 yards by April 8th. He was doubtful, however, whether the strength of his artillery would allow him to include in his objective Quéant, in front of which the Germans were hurriedly digging an advanced line apparently almost as strong as the Hindenburg Line itself.<sup>22</sup> Haig decided that Gough's task should be limited to seizing a sector of the Hindenburg Line—he was not to push farther; but through the gap opened by his troops the 4th Cavalry Division was to pass into the area in front of the Drocourt-Quéant switch, where it would join the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Cavalry Divisions, which would have passed through the main breach between Arras and Vimy.

Up to this point the keenness of the local commander and the comparative lukewarmness of G.H.Q. suggest a parallel to the events preceding the Battle of Fromelles. But the passage of cavalry through a breach in the Fifth Army's

<sup>21</sup> Fires were seen in villages behind the line and captured orders were read as containing a hint of this withdrawal. Haig on March 20 ordered certain exploratory raids under heavy bombardment; if these showed that the Germans were withdrawing, the Third Army was to attack without delay. By April 1 these anxieties had infected Nivelle. Haig assured him that the First, Third, and Fifth Armies had been directed to attack if they obtained evidence that the Germans were retiring. The evidence obtained, however, was all to the contrary.

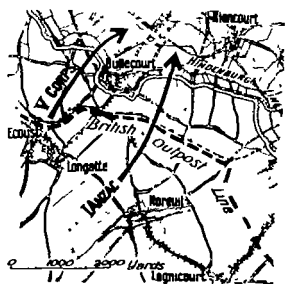
<sup>22</sup> See sketch on p. 257. This was the "Balcony Trench," practically a part of the Hindenburg Line, dug at the last moment. The historian of the 123rd I.R. describes it as a "confused zigzag, not easy to find your way about."



front was a plan on which Haig came to set much store, since he held this process likely to be easier than the movement along the crowded roads from Arras. He now directed his staff to consider whether a few tanks might not be allotted to Gough's army as well as to the others. Gough intimated that if four could be spared they might be of great assistance. It was subsequently found possible to increase this number first to eight, and eventually to twelve.

Preparation for an attack had thus been authorised, but its delivery depended upon whether Gough's artillery was sufficient and could be advanced quickly enough to smash the still intact trenches and wire-entanglements. On the 24th Gough ordered his corps commanders to move forward the whole of their heavy artillery "as soon as the state of the roads permits"; a proportion of the howitzers and all the sixty-pounders were to be thrust "well forward" so as to fire upon German batteries emplaced behind the Hindenburg Line. The bombardment of that line, however, could not commence until ammunition was available, and this depended upon the date at which the railway, destroyed by the Germans before retirement, could be reopened as far as Achiet-le-Grand. This was expected to occur on March 30th, but was actually achieved on the 28th.

Meanwhile on the 26th Gough acquainted his corps commanders in conference with his first suggestions as to the method of attack. The sector to be seized would be in the neighbourhood of Bullecourt, a village lying in front of the general alignment of the Hindenburg Line, but included in it by extending the front trench around its eastern, southern, and western sides. It thus formed a marked projection or bastion of the line, and had received the earliest bombardment. A division of the V Corps would strike on the western side of the bastion, and either one or two divisions of the I Anzac Corps on the eastern side. Gough himself favoured a plan, resembling that which had succeeded at Croisilles, of ignoring Bullecourt itself, striking past it on either flank, leaving the village to be



reduced when these flanking forces had joined hands beyond it; but this detail was left for future consideration. In the meantime, as soon as the intervening villages—Ecoust, Noreuil, and Lagnicourt—were taken, the field batteries were to be brought up to them. Assuming that the railway was open to Achiet-le-Grand by the 28th and to Bapaume by April 3rd, the bombardment of the Hindenburg Line might begin on April 1st, thus allowing eight days of artillery preparation before the attack. There were sufficient guns and howitzers to bombard 4,000 yards of front, although, owing to the shortness of time, the "guns must fire hard."<sup>23</sup> The infantry would attack on a front of 3,000 yards, but must approach over the open, since no trench system could be dug in front of the German line in the time available. Accordingly, as soon as Ecoust, Noreuil, and Lagnicourt were taken, posts would be thrust forward close to the Hindenburg Line, and the divisions must assemble at night in rear of these, and attack at dawn. The corps commanders were to consider how the tanks could most profitably assist. The narrative of the conference given in the diary of the General Staff, Fifth Army, states that General Birdwood "agreed with the general plan."<sup>24</sup>

The time for bombardment, however, proved much shorter than even Gough had anticipated. The capture of the last villages was held up through the requirements of the V Corps until April 2nd, and not until the 3rd could the field-guns begin moving into their very advanced positions in the valleys behind those villages. It will be remembered that most of the depressions and spurs along which the Fifth Army was advancing ran straight towards the enemy's line, rendering it extremely difficult to conceal a



<sup>23</sup> The quotation is from a narrative of the proceedings at the conference. The task of the Anzac artillery was to destroy 1,870 yards of wire, 50 yards thick, on the front of the attack; 375 yards of similar entanglement on the eastern side of Bullecourt (which was enfiladed); and 1,800 yards of wire, ten yards thick, in front of the second Hindenburg trench.

<sup>24</sup> It is possibly to be inferred that he did not agree with the details.

massed artillery. In support of the 4th Australian Division—which held the line beyond Noreuil, and had been marked for the Australian part in the attack—there must be crowded seven brigades of field artillery.<sup>25</sup> Those already in the sector—two brigades of the 2nd Australian Division and the 12th (Army) Brigade, A.F.A.—began on April 2nd and 3rd to move into the depression leading to Noreuil, and on the 5th and 6th advanced into positions hurriedly constructed by the engineers still farther down the side of the valley. The two brigades of the 4th Division's artillery moved, between April 3rd and 6th, into positions—chiefly in slightly sunken roads—on the plateau and shallow depression behind Ecoust and Longatte; those of the 1st Division<sup>26</sup> on the nights of April 8th and 9th were thrust into the open valley north-west of Lagnicourt. Six brigades of artillery—including the 6th Australian (Army) Brigade—had to be similarly emplaced behind the division of the V Corps—the 62nd<sup>27</sup>—allotted for the attack.

Thus the field artillery could not begin its task until April 4th, and then only with a few batteries. The cutting of wire had therefore at first to be entrusted almost solely to the siege batteries firing with the new "instantaneous fuse."<sup>28</sup> But the heavy artillery, in its turn, was hampered by the difficulty of bringing up not only guns, but ammunition. On or before March 29th, when only eight heavy howitzers of I Anzac were within range of the Hindenburg Line, Sir Douglas Haig had laid it down that the roads were not to be ruined by hurrying up guns and ammunition.<sup>29</sup> Accordingly, although the eagerly anticipated opening of the railway to Achiet-le-Grand had just taken place, Gough and his corps commanders decided to stop for the time being the transport of ammunition along it, and to bring up instead stone for the roads and material for hastening the repair of the railway

<sup>25</sup> Totalling 126 guns and 36 howitzers. In an appreciation by the corps staff, it was estimated that at least 136 guns would be needed for the barrage.

<sup>26</sup> The 1st Australian Division had not been accompanied by its artillery when it took over the southern sector of the I Anzac front, but had temporarily taken over the 5th Division's artillery.

<sup>27</sup> The 62nd relieved the 7th Division after the capture of Ecoust-Longatte.

<sup>28</sup> See p. 99.

<sup>29</sup> This was stated by General Gough at a conference at I Anzac Headquarters on March 29.

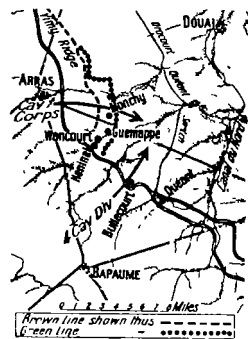
as far as Bapaume. On April 3rd many motor lorries—which had hitherto been carrying road material—were allowed to draw ammunition for one day from Achiet-le-Grand, those of the V Corps, however, only drawing half-loads; but, for several days after this, all available motor transport of I Anzac was set again to carry road-making material. Thus, although on March 31st two, and on the night of April 2nd eight, more siege batteries were brought forward from Bapaume to the places prepared for them—constituting with the two already in position and three batteries of sixty-pounders, the entire heavy artillery attached to the I Anzac Corps<sup>30</sup>—shortage of ammunition prevented their full use. This difficulty was recognised by Gough when, on March 31st, in ordering that the bombardment should “begin this day,” he stated: “Owing to the transportation difficulties in the supply of ammunition, the commencement of the bombardment of the Hindenburg Line will be light, but it will gradually become heavier day by day. It will be intense from April 7th onwards till the day of the attack.”

The available German records show that the Germans did not expect the Fifth Army's artillery to come so soon into action against the Hindenburg Line. The destruction of the railways had been carried out with characteristic German thoroughness.<sup>31</sup> The railway from Vaulx-Vraucourt and Mory past Noreuil to Quéant was, like all others that were not required to the last, entirely removed, and the remainder were torn or blown up in various ways at the last moment. Mines with “delay-action” fuses were left in many places, and five of them, including one at Achiet-le-Grand, exploded about a month after the withdrawal. Nevertheless, Dr. Kretschmann admits, “the rapidity of the enemy's achievement in restoring this thoroughly demolished network of railways must be recognised.”

<sup>30</sup> Four siege batteries were in position, but two were supporting the right division, and only eight howitzers bombarding the Hindenburg Line. The total heavy artillery allotted to I Anzac was 12 siege batteries (i.e., 48 heavy howitzers) and 3 heavy batteries (18 sixty-pounders). Of these, 30 howitzers and the sixty-pounders would support the 4th Division's attack, the destruction of wire-entanglements and trenches being carried out by 22 howitzers, and the remaining 8 howitzers and all the sixty-pounders being turned upon the German batteries. An additional battery of heavy howitzers (the 194th Siege Battery) was brought up on April 9 to Beugny. These batteries were all British, and were grouped as follows: 2nd Heavy Artillery Group (behind Vaulx-Vraucourt and the distillery)—23rd, 30th, 42nd, and 115th Siege Batteries, 9th H.A.G. (behind Vaulx-Vraucourt)—13th and 33rd Siege and 122nd Heavy Batteries; 14th H.A.G. (behind Morchies and Beugny)—34th, 88th, 140th, and 194th Siege Batteries; 23rd H.A.G. (behind Morchies and Beugny)—24th and 78th Siege and 26th and 116th Heavy Batteries. The batteries first brought forward were in advance of Bapaume by March 23. The 78th and 88th Siege were brought up on March 31. The remainder, except the 194th Siege, on April 2-3. The two Australian siege batteries (then known as the 54th and 55th) were supporting the XVII Corps (Third Army) in the main Arras offensive.

<sup>31</sup> See an article in *Deutsche Wehr* (Berlin) of 7 August, 1929, by Major a.D. Dr. Kretschmann.

The four groups of heavy artillery allotted to I Anzac, of which three were mainly engaged on the front of the coming attack, fired between April 5th and 8th 23,581 shells, but of these only a comparatively small proportion had instantaneous fuses, the supply of which was short and irregular.<sup>32</sup> The cutting of the wire by the Australian field artillery—mainly by 4.5-inch howitzers with instantaneous fuses—did not begin until April 7th. Five days earlier the attack had been definitely ordered by Haig: the Fifth Army would deliver it at the same time as the Third Army assaulted its third objective, which consisted of the third German defence system lying from one to one and a half miles beyond the Arras front and was designated as the "brown line." It was at this stage that the Third Army would bring up its two cavalry divisions, ready to be passed through on the attainment of the fourth objective (the "green line").<sup>33</sup> As the high village of Monchy le Preux, as well as Guémappe, Wancourt, and Héninel in the Cojeul valley south of it, would then have been passed, the Cavalry Corps might be quickly joined by the 4th Cavalry Division if Gough succeeded in passing it through the Hindenburg Line a few miles to the south-east. Eventually—although if the offensive proceeded in accordance with time-table the "green" line would be reached twelve hours earlier—it was decided that the moment for Gough's intervention would probably occur twenty-four hours after the launching of the main offensive. Accordingly when, on April 5th, the main attack was postponed from the 8th to the 9th of April, the Fifth Army's operation was ordered for dawn on the 10th.



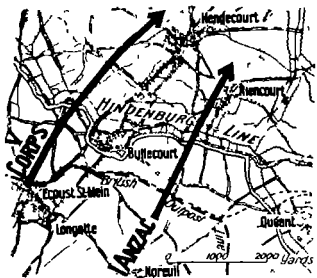
At a conference on March 29th Gough had assured his corps commanders—"no attack will be made unless we are quite ready"; and during the days preceding the main offensive the responsible Anzac leaders became increasingly apprehensive

**Anxiety at  
Corps H.Q.**

<sup>32</sup> By April 15 12,000 had been used against the wire.

<sup>33</sup> This lay  $1\frac{1}{2}$  to 2 miles beyond the German front line.

as to the thoroughness of the preparation and the extent of the task set before their troops. The railway embankment and cuttings, which the Australian troops had only begun to reach on the night of April 5th, were almost 1,000 yards short of the nearest part of the Hindenburg Line to be attacked by the corps, which, in the first phase of its attack, was to ignore Bullecourt and seize a sector of the deep re-entrant between that village and Quéant. The V Corps, which was to attack in a similar manner on the other side of Bullecourt, was equally far from its objective, and on April 4th Gough had ordered that, if by the night of April 5th both corps had not established posts within attacking distance of the Hindenburg Line, they were to advance that night under cover of a barrage and do so. There was, however, a distinct risk that such a proceeding would cause the enemy to suspect the impending attack, and the corps commanders afterwards obtained Gough's consent to their making their own arrangements for establishing these posts.



To the Anzac leaders, Lieutenant-General Birdwood and Major-General White, his chief-of-staff, the plan proposed to them had from the first appeared to involve another serious danger. On March 31st in his appreciation White wrote:

Between Quéant and Bullecourt the enemy's line forms a re-entrant some 1,500 yards deep. . . . An attack here would be unwise unless Quéant were also attacked.

It is true that by driving into so deep a gulf in the German line the force would, if it succeeded, have penetrated much farther into the enemy's system than if it merely struck at his salients. But such an attempt bristled with well recognised difficulties. To the British layman the best known example of such an attack is the famous action of the Light Brigade at Balaclava, whose regiments were given the task of attacking a position in which there were "cannon to left of them, cannon to right of them, cannon in front of them." The attack by I Anzac must pass between the Bullecourt salient on its left and the Quéant salient on its right, and strike at

the end of the gulf. With sufficient artillery, however, the risk of such action might be overcome, and, although the Bullecourt salient constituted (as was pointed out in a written commentary from White and Birdwood on April 5th) "a menace to the main attack," it was proposed to suppress the enemy there during the advance by turning upon him a great part of the heavy artillery and the 4.5-inch howitzers of both corps. The Quéant salient lay on the slope down to another valley, and it was arranged to direct the advance in such a way that the right flank would be just screened from it by the crest of the spur. This would protect the troops against rifle and machine-gun fire from that flank, and although certain batteries at Quéant could fire into their flank and rear these could be hampered by counter-battery fire, and the Quéant salient muffled with smoke and other barrages.<sup>84</sup>

A further cause of anxiety was the extent of the later objectives proposed by the army commander. At a conference on April 4th Birdwood had agreed to attack a second objective, the village of Riencourt,<sup>85</sup> half-a-mile beyond the Hindenburg Line in the I Anzac sector, and also a third objective connecting this with the objective of the V Corps, which was to seize, if possible, the village of Hendecourt,<sup>86</sup> a mile beyond the Hindenburg Line in its sector. This would involve an advance of 3,000 yards by the Australian troops and nearly 4,000 by the British.<sup>87</sup> The Australians would have to form a flank from the captured section of the Hindenburg Line about the Moulin sans Souci to Riencourt village, the flank lying along the same crest that would thus far have screened the right. This operation would bring the Australian line face to face, at



*Original plan of Bullecourt offensive.*

<sup>84</sup> These barrages were, as far as ammunition allowed, to simulate an attack.

<sup>85</sup> The full name is Riencourt-lez-Cagnicourt. Cagnicourt itself lay a mile and a half to the north-east of Riencourt.

<sup>86</sup> The full name is Hendecourt-lez-Cagnicourt.

<sup>87</sup> Presumably this came within Haig's earlier ruling, which limited the Fifth Army's action to taking the Hindenburg Line and passing the cavalry through.

1,000 or 1,200 yards' distance, with the Drocourt-Quéant switch, but would involve an awkward change of front and must be carried out under fire from the Hindenburg Line farther east, as well as from the switch—"a difficult operation," as was pointed out to the army commander.<sup>38</sup> These movements, however, would be effective and important if the Third Army succeeded, and the difficulties were, accordingly, accepted, reliance being placed upon the artillery and, in a minor degree, upon the tanks, for overcoming them. But the operation order received from Gough on April 5th set for the I Anzac Corps a still farther objective, involving a final advance eastwards on a front of 3,000 yards and to a depth, on the right, of more than a mile, with the right flank brushing the rear of the Hindenburg Line throughout the whole operation, which would end with the troops facing, at close range, the Drocourt-Quéant switch. This astonishing project might, if practicable, have crowned the Fifth Army with all the laurels to be won in the British offensive, but, in the conditions which then governed warfare in France, victory might have been sought almost as reasonably by a plan to capture the moon. Birdwood immediately objected,<sup>39</sup> and this objective was omitted from subsequent orders.

Even with the fourth objective omitted, it was realised that the project entailed great difficulty. Gough himself recognised this, and, in conference with Allenby, urged it as an imperative reason for launching the attack at an hour suitable for the Australian troops—before daylight. But he was equally insistent that, with the Third Army a few miles away pledged to a tremendous effort, the Fifth Army must strike a powerful blow to assist. Nor could the Anzac

<sup>38</sup> In the commentary written on April 5 on receipt of the operation order from Fifth Army. "A great difficulty in the attack of this corps (it was stated) will be the protection of the right flank." "Awfully difficult," was General White's comment, noted in the diary of a friend.

<sup>39</sup> He wrote: "In 'Fifth Army Operation Order 50' there is shown an objective in V 13 and 19 (i.e., a mile east of Riencourt), 1,800 yards in front of the second objective with a front of 3,000 yards." After pointing out that this would require the employment of an additional division, he added that, although he had another division ready to follow up, he did not think "such an objective can be included in the definite operation for which arrangements are being made." It lay immediately in front of the Drocourt-Quéant line, whose strength had not yet been ascertained, and its right flank "is immediately in rear of portion of the enemy's main Hindenburg Line, which it by no means follows will fall during our main attack." It would also be beyond the range of the artillery, which could hardly be moved forward in time to cover the movement



leaders or their troops contemplate standing idly by if an assisting stroke on their part was a feasible operation; and the leaders, though not in love with Gough's plan, believed that it might be carried out, provided that preparation by the artillery was sufficient. But by April 7th they were becoming gravely doubtful of the adequacy of this preparation. The Hindenburg Line had on this front been intentionally constructed slightly on the reverse slope,<sup>40</sup> so that, where possible, it was hidden from opponents directly in front until they were within a few hundred yards. This was a cause of anxiety to its garrison, which in many parts could keep watch on their enemy only by sending patrols to the outer edge of the entanglements. But it carried this advantage, that many parts both of the trenches and of the entanglements were difficult to bombard with accuracy. British and Australian artillery observers made use of those points in the forward area from which parts of the line were visible; all day long from the sunken road between Noreuil and Longatte and from other similar vantage-points, they watched through glasses the black plumes of their shell-bursts spurting from the smooth green surface a mile or more beyond. But from the ground the German wire was difficult to see. Most of the shooting on it had to be directed from aeroplanes, and on the afternoon of April 7th two airmen of No. 3 Squadron, sent to examine it from the air, reported that, although it had been damaged along most of the intended front of attack, the damage was uneven. Special reports received daily from the infantry all told the same tale—the wire was partly cut, but largely intact. General White himself went up to Longatte, from which point he could see the long rusty belt, evidently still a most formidable obstacle. On the night of the 7th patrols reported that in spite of damage no gaps yet existed. Birdwood and White concluded that the preparation was insufficient, and when, at a conference at Bihucourt Chateau on the morning of the 8th, Gough asked White if the corps could carry out the attack—"Very well, General," was the reply, "but not till the wire is cut." "How long will it take to cut?" "At the least—eight days."

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<sup>40</sup> The Germans called it a "*hinterhang stellung*," "reverse-slope trench."

This reply came as a shock to the army commander, but he accepted it. A telegram was at once sent to G.H.Q.—

Fifth Army cannot carry out their attack owing to the fact that they have not been able to cut the wire. General Gough hopes to be able to attack Thursday (April 12). Everything possible will be done by Fifth Army to assist the Third Army's attack by means of bombardment. Written confirmation follows.

The attempt on the Hindenburg Line was thus postponed till such time as the wire-cutting was finished, both corps being warned that it might take place on April 12th unless the Germans withdrew previously. Should the enemy retire on the 9th in consequence of the blow to be struck that day at Arras, the brigades of the Fifth Army holding the line were to be prepared to follow up the withdrawal; the mounted troops of both corps and the 4th Cavalry Division must accordingly be brought up in readiness early on the 9th. The artillery was to carry out special bombardments.

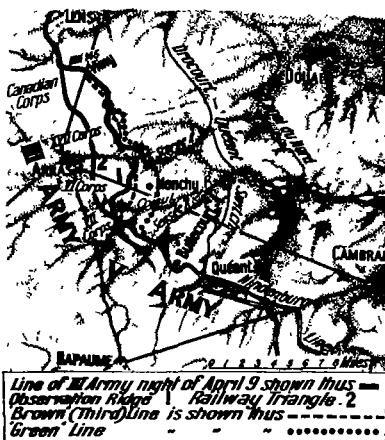
At dawn<sup>41</sup> on Easter Monday 1917 the First and Third British Armies launched their great offensive at Vimy and Arras respectively. It had been prepared for by a massed artillery such as had never before assisted a British Army. At the Somme on the 1st of July, 1916, there was a gun to every 15½ yards; here there was one to every 8 yards, and, although the preliminary bombardment lasted for only five days as against seven on the Somme, each gun fired on an average 5½ tons of ammunition daily, as against 3¾ tons. The front of the British attack was slightly narrower than on the Somme, and the support of the French on the immediate right, which had so powerful an influence on the Somme offensive, was here lacking. Of the forty-eight "tanks," which were present at wide intervals in order to follow and assist the infantry, a small proportion gave decisive assistance at important points, but at least two-thirds were ditched or otherwise placed out of action before reaching their objectives. On the other hand, the infantry, both staff and troops, was more experienced than on the Somme, and the "creeping

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<sup>41</sup> The attack began at 5.30. The sun rose at 6.9.

barrage"<sup>42</sup> thrown in front of it by the artillery furnished—so long as the elaborate time-table could be adhered to—a protection immeasurably better than that of the bombardments in the early stages of the Somme battle.

The consequence was that, along the whole front, the attack succeeded to an extent unknown since the deadlock in the West began, and perhaps hardly expected by British commanders who recalled the first day of the Somme with its complete failure along part of the line and German strong-  
posts standing at other points like promontories while the attack swept past. At Arras the success in the first two stages (which corresponded with the enemy's first and second systems of defence) was almost complete. Only in three localities were there important failures: in the extreme north the resistance to the left of the Canadian Corps attacking "Hill 145" on Vimy Ridge proved very stubborn. Again, on the extreme south of the offensive, where the VII Corps, like the Fifth Army, had only recently confronted the Hindenburg Line, and the bombardment had consequently to be conducted at rather long range, progress was slower than elsewhere. More unfortunately, in the centre, the VI Corps, advancing south of the River Scarpe (which flows eastward past Arras), had its centre and northern divisions—the 12th and the 15th (Scottish)—held up by machine-gun fire from "Observation Ridge," the left of the 15th being also involved in heavy fighting south of the Scarpe at a junction of railways known as "The Triangle"; it was not until early in the afternoon that the Scots carried this position.



<sup>a</sup> An innovation in the British Army since the early days on the Somme. Its gradual development is followed in *Volume III*, in which it is indexed under "Artillery."

This delay had important effects in the next stage of the battle. For the first time in any important British offensive on the Western Front, the more distant objectives were to be seized, not by the divisions which attacked the first two objectives, but by others brought up to pass through or "leap-frog" over them.<sup>43</sup> Immediately north of the Scarpe the 9th Scottish Division (including its South African Brigade) punctually broke through the second German line at Athies and allowed the 4th British Division to pass through and seize the third line at Fampoux, but south of the Scarpe the artillery, held back by the delay at The Triangle, was unable to move up and cut the wire of the third line as intended; and when, about 7 p.m., the two brigades of the 37th Division, having come through the 12th and 15th, advanced against it they were held up by machine-guns firing from behind the uncut wire. Unsuccessful attempts were made after dark to seize the line by bombing. A small body of cavalry managed to penetrate beyond it, just south of the river, and captured a number of prisoners and some guns. But the main cavalry force which had been brought up from Arras had to be sent back for the night, and orders were given that all parts of the third line not yet captured were to be attacked by the infantry next morning.

The messages which poured in upon General Gough from the First and Third Armies during the morning of April 9th, presenting the position as several hours previously it was believed to be, told of success upon success. If these continued it was evident that the opportunity for which Haig had been nursing his cavalry might occur that evening. Yet Gough's army was doing nothing to assist, except using its artillery and keeping watch on the German lines for signs of any decision by the

**Fifth Army's  
attitude**

<sup>43</sup> The same principle, as is pointed out by Dewar and Boraston (*Sir Douglas Haig's Command, Vol. I, p. 270*), had been normally practised within the divisions, platoons, companies, battalions, or brigades leap-frogging over one another at successive trenches or other objectives, but it had not yet been generally practised by divisions. From this time onward leap-frogging with divisions became a normal method of attack in the British Army, and was carried out with minute care, the classical example of this being probably the arrangements made by Sir John Monash for bringing forward the rear divisions of the Australian Corps on 8 August, 1918.

enemy to withdraw to the Drocourt-Quéant switch. Gough's constant suspicion that the Hindenburg Line was held much less strongly than was imagined had been reinforced that morning by the statements of three English soldiers who had escaped from a German prison camp not far beyond the line<sup>44</sup> and reached the Australian front near Bullecourt early on April 8th. At 9.15 a.m. on the 9th Gough telegraphed to his corps commanders that, from the statements of these men, it seemed

that the chances of our getting patrols into enemy lines are greater than imagined. . . . Corps must be prepared to push forward as instructed [*i.e.*, to send forward patrols and, if these could establish themselves in the Hindenburg Line, follow them up with larger forces and advance farther] . . . and, in order to assist the possible advance of patrols and advanced guards this afternoon, corps will instruct that artillery fire of all calibres should be kept as intense as possible. . . .

Such was the position when, early in the afternoon, General Gough received a sudden visit from the commander of the "tanks" allotted to him for the attack at Bullecourt, which had been temporarily cancelled. The tanks were still an experimental instrument. They had recently been organised in "battalions" of which four, "A," "B," "C," and "D," were in France. Each battalion was to comprise three companies, each company having twelve or more tanks, but the force was still in skeleton. The 11th company of "D" Battalion, which had been sent to the Fifth Army with twelve tanks, had been formed only at the beginning of the year, its commander, Major Watson,<sup>45</sup> having come from a cyclist battalion, and his men including a few "old tankers"—originally motor drivers and mechanics of the army service corps—some of whom had served with tanks on the Somme, and a sprinkling of men from motor machine-gun companies, but the great majority being volunteers from the infantry. They had trained keenly in the back area,<sup>46</sup> but with "far too few tanks" for adequate practice,<sup>47</sup> and when Watson, having eventually received his tanks (mainly of the old "Mark I"

<sup>44</sup> These were Lance-Corporals H. E. Parsey and C. J. Piggott and Private T. O. Downes, all of the 5th Dorset Regiment. They had been employed in a German retaliation camp (*see note on p. 342*) and had been shamefully overworked and underfed; they were covered with boils, and one at least was within measurable distance of death from these causes.

<sup>45</sup> Major W. H. L. Watson, D.S.O., D.C.M.; Royal Tank Corps. University student; of Oxford and Scotland, b Westminster, London, 3 Aug., 1891. Died, 16 Dec., 1932.

<sup>46</sup> At Blangy-sur-Ternoise.

<sup>47</sup> The quotations are from *A Company of Tanks*, by Major Watson.

type), took them on April 1st by train to Achiet-le-Grand, their drivers, in the difficult task of detraining, twice "narrowly missed" the office building of the railway transport officer. "With two exceptions," he writes, "my officers had neither experience nor skill." One tank remained under repair in Achiet-le-Grand, but the other eleven were now concealed in a quarry at Mory, three miles from Ecoust, awaiting the day when they were to be used at scattered points along the front of Gough's army.

Officers of the tanks<sup>48</sup> had long since held that this was the wrong way for employing them: instead of following the infantry at wide intervals to suppress particular strong-points, they should be massed and advance in front of the infantry, attacking by surprise and fulfilling to some extent the purpose of a barrage. On the other hand many commanders of infantry which had acted with tanks were, through sharp experience, averse from placing much reliance on them, far preferring to base their operations on artillery support, which the action of the tanks ahead of their troops would largely deny them. Consequently the leaders of the tank corps had thus far had no opportunity of attempting the tactics on which their hearts were set.

Now, however, an opportunity offered. It was common knowledge that the Fifth Army was rather short of artillery for the heavy task confronting it;<sup>49</sup> and on the night of April 8th Major Watson worked out, for his own satisfaction, a "surprise concentration" in which his tanks, massed on a narrow front ahead of the infantry, should "steal up to the Hindenburg Line without a barrage."<sup>50</sup> As they entered the German trenches, down would come the barrage," under cover of which, and assisted by the tanks, the infantry would "sweep through." The German artillery, which might be more deadly to tanks than to infantry, would be pounded by all guns not employed in the barrage. He was so pleased with this scheme that, during the morning

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<sup>48</sup> Their corps was then still known, for purposes of secrecy, as the "Heavy Branch of the Machine Gun Corps."

<sup>49</sup> Major Watson writes. "The artillery of the Fifth Army was, to the best of my knowledge, far from overwhelming, and gunners had told me that good forward positions for the guns were difficult to find."

<sup>50</sup> The noise was to be drowned by machine-gun fire.

of the 9th, he submitted it to the commander of the tank battalion, Lieutenant-Colonel Lloyd,<sup>51</sup> at Béhagnies, who thoroughly approved of it and decided to lay it before General Gough. The episode is vividly told by Watson:

After a hasty lunch we motored down to the headquarters of the Fifth Army. We found General Gough receiving in triumph the reports of our successes on the Third Army front opposite Arras. "We want to break the Hindenburg Line with tanks, General," said the colonel, and very briefly explained the scheme. General Gough received it with favour, and decided to attack at dawn on the following morning. He asked me when my tanks would require to start. The idea of an attack within twenty-four hours was a little startling—there were so many preparations to be made; but I replied my tanks should move at once. . . . We drove at breakneck speed to the chateau near, which was occupied by the Australian Corps, and were left by General Gough to work out the details with the Brigadier-General of the General Staff (General White).

To Birdwood and White, who were full of doubts as to the scheme, Gough pointed out that the wire in front of the Hindenburg Line would no longer be an obstacle: the tank leaders undertook that it should be broken down before the infantry would be asked to attack. When the tanks had done this, and were themselves subduing the Hindenburg Line, they were to exhibit a signal, and the infantry would then advance. Moreover there would be no attack unless the situation on the main front rendered it probable that the Third Army's cavalry would be passed through. If, however, the Third Army was then in process of making its supreme effort, it was "up to" the I Anzac Corps to strain every nerve to assist.<sup>52</sup> With grave misgivings the Anzac leaders gave way to the army commander's desire. Gough and the tank leaders, who had experience of tanks and knew their capacity, seemed convinced that they were capable of the projected task. The Anzac leaders, who had never operated with tanks, could only

#### **Doubts of Anzac leaders**

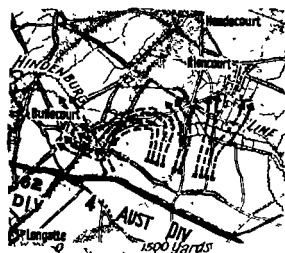
<sup>51</sup> Brig.-Gen. J. Hardress Lloyd, D.S.O. Commanded 1st Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, 1916/17; 3rd Tank Bn, 1917; 3rd Tank Bde., 1917/18; 1st Tank Group, 1918. Officer of British Regular Army; of King's Co., Ireland; b. Glosters, King's Co., 14 Aug., 1874.

<sup>52</sup> In the diary of an Australian on corps headquarters the incident is summarised as follows—"When news of Arras came, Gough said to Corps, 'If we get on in the northern part of the attack, it is up to you to do something. What are you going to do?' White said: 'Unless there's some worthy object to be gained, we cannot put a division up to face very heavy losses in front of wire. But if he likes to send tanks through (the) wire first, our infantry will follow after.'"

base their doubts on hearsay, and White, more than Birdwood, was especially impressed by the enthusiasm of the tank leaders.

They were extraordinarily keen and gallant (he said that evening)—ready to tackle anything—keen to undertake it. "Oh! We'll do that for you," they said. They'll be ready and anxious to take those tanks anywhere, and tremendously confident.

These were not, however, the actual officers who would have to drive the tanks, and Birdwood accepted the project entirely against his own inclinations. The arrangement finally made was that early in the night patrols should be sent out to ascertain whether the Germans had withdrawn from the Hindenburg Line (as Gough constantly suspected they might do). If so, it was to be occupied and a farther advance to Rencourt made in the morning. If, on the other hand, the Hindenburg Line was still garrisoned, Gough might order it to be attacked with the assistance of tanks, at dawn. All Watson's tanks would be concentrated on the front of the 4th Australian Division, and only that division would, in the first phase, follow them. But, when once they had seized the Hindenburg Line, four of them, followed by an Australian battalion, would turn westwards and subdue Bullecourt. Their appearance, and flares fired by the Australians in Bullecourt, would be the signal for the 62nd British Division of the V Corps to come forward, occupy the village, and then seize, with the assistance of the four tanks, the Hindenburg Line west of it. The Hindenburg Line having been captured, both divisions would proceed to attack the more distant objectives laid down in the plans already made, the 4th Australian Division taking Rencourt, and the 62nd Hendecourt.



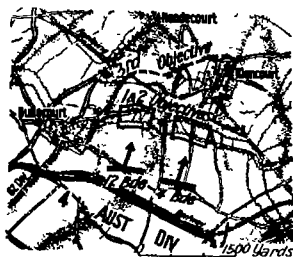
*Intended action of tanks at dawn, April 10 (according to orders by Lieut.-Col. Hardress Lloyd, their commander, April 9).*

*This differs from the plan as generally understood by the Australians.*

Leaving this hurried conference the tank commander "tore back to Béhagnies" in his colonel's car, and wrote out his orders. These reached his tanks at Mory by 6.30 p.m., and by 8 o'clock they had started. The arrangements for the



two infantry divisions, necessarily more elaborate, were made in even greater haste. It was 4 p.m. when an outline of the order was passed verbally to General Holmes of the 4th Australian Division. He telephoned at once to the two brigades which held his line and had been marked for the attack. The general dispositions for the attack were necessarily those laid down in the orders for the postponed attack—there was not time for extensive changes even if they had been advisable. According to these plans, the 4th Division was to assault two sectors of the enemy front in the re-entrant between Bullecourt and Quéant, omitting a sector in the middle which lay at the bottom of a depression and might therefore, in the opinion of General White, form a deadly channel for the enemy's machine-gun fire. This gap was to be attacked by four tanks, the infantry assault being delivered along the somewhat higher ground on either side of the dip, the 4th Brigade advancing on the right and the 12th on the left. As the 4th Brigade must drive on farther to Riencourt, it was to attack with four battalions, the 16th and 14th for seizing the Hindenburg Line, and the 13th and 15th for passing through them to capture Riencourt. The 12th Brigade would attack with only two, the 46th to seize the first trench of the Hindenburg Line, and the 48th to seize the second and then throw out a line of posts to protect the flank of the 4th Brigade.



Each brigade had only two battalions already in the forward area.<sup>53</sup> Each of these had one company at the railway, the others in Noreuil, Noreuil Valley, and in successive sunken roads west of that village. To enable the foremost attacking lines to assemble nearer to the enemy, and to provide room for the rear lines, positions had been secured by both brigades beyond the railway. On the night of April 7th patrols of the 4th Brigade had found that a sunken track<sup>54</sup> across the hill-crest, 250 to 350 yards in front, was not

<sup>53</sup> They had been holding the railway embankment and cuttings since the night of April 7, the front-line battalions being, from left to right, the 48th, 46th, 14th, and 16th.

<sup>54</sup> A road from Quéant to Bullecourt.

occupied by the enemy, and at dusk on the 8th the foremost companies of the 14th and 16th Battalions had advanced and occupied it. Farther west the 12th Brigade had dug assembly trenches, the 46th Battalion 300 yards ahead of the railway, the 48th 250 yards behind it. Now, on the receipt of Holmes's warning message, Brigadier-General Brand (4th Brigade) ordered up from Favreuil, near Bapaume, his two reserve battalions, the 13th and 15th, designated for the Riencourt objective. About 10 p.m. both battalions marched.

Meanwhile, as ordered, both brigades sent out patrols to ascertain if the Hindenburg Line had been evacuated. In the 12th Brigade, through a misunderstanding of Gough's intention, the 48th Battalion was at first ordered by the brigadier to send 200 men into Bullecourt. The order was resisted by Colonel Leane, who himself had seen the entanglements and believed the trenches to be held. The timely arrival of a divisional staff officer dispelled the error.<sup>55</sup> The patrols were sent out at nightfall. The scouting by both brigades on previous nights had been thorough, but on this night it was understood that particular importance was attached to the results. The commander of the 4th Brigade, who also desired a thoroughly trustworthy investigation of the state of the wire, entrusted the task, as a special mission, to Captain Jacka (14th—the first Australian to win the Victoria Cross in this war) and Lieutenants Wadge and Bradley (16th) and a few men. Jacka penetrated the entanglement on the right front of the brigade, and found it there thoroughly destroyed, though in other parts intact.<sup>56</sup> Of the presence of the enemy, there was ample evidence, a German machine-gun firing from a forward sap, two parties mending the wire, and in No-Man's Land an active patrol which eventually prevented further reconnaissance.<sup>57</sup> The experienced officers of Brand's patrol were impressed with the enemy's strength, and urged that, without further wire-cutting and strong artillery support, there was no hope of success. Brand

<sup>55</sup> Leane characteristically urged that, if the order was definite, it involved the destruction of a company, and he must choose his nephew's company for the task.

<sup>56</sup> The four groups of heavy artillery supporting I Anzac fired on April 9, 6,025 shells, and on April 10, 8,118. Only a comparatively small porportion of these, however, were fired at the wire. See p. 263.

<sup>57</sup> Jacka, while working in the enemy's wire, heard this patrol. He lay silent until it had passed back through the German wire, and then made his return journey through a passage left in the wire for German patrols.

appears to have apprised the divisional staff of their opinion. The patrols of the 12th Brigade reported that several gaps, twenty yards wide, had been cut in the wire, and that the trenches were held. In front of Bullecourt itself the wire was uncut and very dense.<sup>58</sup>

It was evident that the Germans had not evacuated the Hindenburg Line; it could not be taken by patrolling, and therefore, if the position of the Third Army was favourable, the attack with tanks would presumably be ordered. The news from the Third Army, however, was far less encouraging than a few hours earlier. It was learnt that the Hindenburg Line on the Fifth Army's flank had not been taken by the VII Corps, and that a break-through in the centre of the offensive was by no means so imminent as previously believed. Consequently, at 11 o'clock General Birdwood telephoned to Gough's chief-of-staff expressing strong doubts as to the wisdom of the intended attack. In view of the admitted strength of the German wire, did the situation of the Third Army, he asked, warrant the undertaking even with strong assistance by tanks? A few machine-guns might cause great havoc. He considered the operation extremely hazardous, unless the Hindenburg Line farther north was definitely broken, and he urged postponement until the following night, when it would be better known whether the situation of the Third Army justified the attempt. Birdwood spoke with emphasis, but the reply, given after a few minutes' consultation, was that Gough ordered the operation to take place, as the Commander-in-Chief wished it.

Three-quarters of an hour later a second protest to the same officer was made by White. He pointed out that the patrol reports now to hand showed that the Hindenburg Line was strongly held. Moreover, information received through

<sup>58</sup> On this front on the night of the 8th a patrol of the 48th Battalion (Western Australia), consisting of five picked scouts under Sergeant F. W. Hammond (of Cannington, W. Aust.), had found that the wire protecting Bullecourt consisted of three belts, each 8 yards wide, close behind one another. Then came an open space of 50 yards, and then, close to the parapet of the trench, a fourth belt, 10 feet thick. The wire was but little cut, but, where shells had made craters without breaking it, the scouts were able to crawl underneath. One of them, Private T. F. Arnold (of Ceduna, S. Aust.), ran into a post of the enemy where the Quéant-Bullecourt sunken road entered the entanglement, but escaped, though the disturbed post called down an artillery barrage on the whole sector. The others, after penetrating the wire, could see the German sentries in each bay of the trench, and machine-guns firing at intervals, and could hear the talk of the garrison.

the V Corps that the 21st Division and the right of the 3rd had been driven back "materially changed the situation and made a haphazard attack hard to justify," unless the Fifth Army possessed other information not available to I Anzac. White pointed out that the arrangements were necessarily hasty, and the tanks an uncertain factor. Gough replied through his chief-of-staff that he was not prepared to alter his decision, since the failure of the Third Army's right only increased the need for action by the Fifth Army.

It will be noted that the professed reason for acting had entirely changed, and, in his formal order issued about the time of Birdwood's protest,<sup>59</sup> Gough notified his corps commanders that the attempt of the Cavalry Corps to break through the Third Army's front had temporarily been abandoned,<sup>60</sup> but that the Anzac corps would attack at dawn and pass the 4th Cavalry Division through the Hindenburg Line *to assist the VII Corps*. Their objections having been overruled, Birdwood and White, after a short discussion, ordered the attack to take place.

Meanwhile, during the evening, after hurried consultations with the V Corps and 62nd Division, plans had been elaborated, their particulars and modifications being forwarded by General Holmes to his brigadiers by letters at 7 p.m. and 9.30. According to these, the tanks were, before 4.30, to be lined out in front of the infantry. Till 4.30 the artillery-fire would be normal, but at that hour a heavy barrage would fall on both flanks, and the tanks would advance; but the infantry would not follow until the tanks had reached and "occupied" the Hindenburg Line, and displayed a green disc or other signal, meaning "come on." Orders had previously been issued that the sound of the approach of the tanks was to be drowned by the fire of certain machine-guns.<sup>61</sup> The instructions were passed on by

<sup>59</sup> It was timed 11.10 p.m.

<sup>60</sup> The main operation order from Fifth Army, issued at 5.50 p.m., had stated that, in the progress of the Arras offensive, the First Army had reached the "Brown" line. The Third Army had gained "the bulk of Brown line. Remainder of Army is approaching it Cavalry Corps has been ordered forward."

<sup>61</sup> With this purpose General Gough had issued special orders for accustoming the enemy to the sound of machine-guns during the night and early morning, but his orders do not appear to have been fully transmitted by the Anzac staffs, and were not adequately carried out.

the brigadiers to their battalions, General Brand adding to Holmes's final letter, which arrived about midnight, a covering note.

Stow the men away somehow. There is no certainty that the attack will take place. All depends on Third Army. The tanks will crumble down the wire.

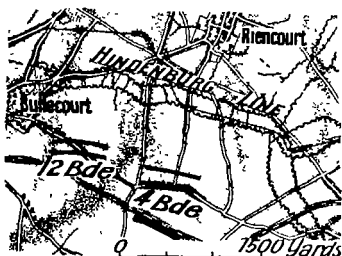
At 12.25 4th Divisional Headquarters received orders to carry out the attack at 4.30,<sup>62</sup> and these were immediately passed on to the brigades. The night was wild and bitterly cold, with a fierce wind and occasional sleet and snow. The tanks had not arrived at the front when the 12th Brigade moved out to its jumping-off trenches and the leading battalions of the 4th Brigade to tapes laid in advance of the sunken road. Captain Jacka and Lieutenant Bradley had gone out again with a few scouts to lay these tapes, and were just finishing the work when the operation narrowly escaped discovery. Two figures were observed boldly approaching from the direction of the enemy. Seeing that they would probably detect the tapes, and must therefore on no account be allowed to return, Jacka at once decided to cut them off. For assistance he went back to the position of an advanced sentry group, but, finding it withdrawn, hurried to the main line, secured the help of a Lewis gunner, and with him worked round behind the two Germans, now almost on the tapes. Upon Jacka's shouting "Halt!" the two men, seeing the Australians coming from behind them, hesitated, but would not hold up their hands. One, who carried a cane, was evidently an officer, and the other, who had a rifle, his orderly. Jacka, now at five yards' distance, aimed his revolver at the officer's head and, when the trigger merely clicked, rushed in and seized him. The officer let fall his cane, the orderly threw down his rifle, Jacka captured the two, and began driving them towards the Australian line. A large German patrol could be heard not far away, and the

<sup>62</sup> At 12.25 General Holmes telegraphed to I Anzac the reports of the final patrols, to the effect that the enemy's line was strongly held, and added that he was "prepared to undertake the operation if approved." At the same hour I Anzac telegraphed to Holmes: "Under Army orders action will be taken on 10th as verbally arranged," and gave a brief outline of the arrangements. It is, of course, possible that the real order was given by telephone a few minutes earlier, and that these telegrams merely confirmed the conversations.

officer hung back as if thinking of escape, but Jacka struck him on the head and at the same time a flare, rising from the Australian line, caused the German party to withdraw. The prisoners proved to be a lieutenant of the III/124th (Württemberg) Infantry Regiment and his orderly, who were out on patrol.<sup>63</sup>

At 1 o'clock the Bullecourt salient was drenched with poison gas by means of a surprise carefully prepared by No. 1 Special Company of the Royal Engineers—a simultaneous discharge of a large number of cylinders fired from "Livens" projectors.<sup>64</sup> The cylinders burst in Bullecourt, emitting a concentration of gas. Rifle and machine-gun fire broke out from the German lines, and it was afterwards ascertained that the enemy was taken by surprise and many casualties caused. This disturbance had long since died down when, about 2.30, the forward battalions moved out to their tapes and assembly trenches.<sup>65</sup> By 4.15 their waves were lying out in good order on the thin snow, which covered the bare slopes and valley. The supporting battalions of the 4th Brigade had arrived after their long march from Favreuil, and were crowded behind the banks of the railway, ready to advance in artillery formation.

In spite of haste in preparation—and consequent discrepancies in orders, vagueness as to certain particulars, and probably a shortage in some branches of supply—never in the history of the A.I.F. was a force more fit for a difficult task than that which lay out before the Hindenburg Line at this moment. The



<sup>63</sup> The officer complained to Lieut.-Colonel J. H. Peck of rough treatment by Jacka, but, seeing that the Australians were not in a position to take any chances, he was obviously fortunate to have escaped with his life. He stated that the German line was strongly held, that six companies were in reserve between Riencourt and Bullecourt, and that the Germans were about to launch an attack. The last statement was not believed, but the others proved fairly accurate.

<sup>64</sup> This method had first been tried a few days earlier in the preparations for the Arras offensive. A number of projectors (resembling large mortars) were set in the ground, and simultaneously fired by electricity. With a small explosive charge these projected the cylinders for a considerable distance. Such an attack was more sudden than the emission of a cloud from cylinders in the British trenches, and the enemy was taken by surprise by the first few discharges.

<sup>65</sup> The 51st Battalion, 13th Brigade, came up to take over the railway line and hold it during the attack.

4th Australian Division, as has been pointed out,<sup>66</sup> was more largely drawn from the "outer" States, and therefore contained a somewhat larger proportion of country-bred men, than any other division; while of those battalions which came from the more closely settled States, the 13th (New South Wales) was always an outstanding unit, and the 14th (Victoria), under one of the finest Australian leaders, Lieutenant-Colonel Peck, and four company commanders who, as a team, can never have been surpassed in the A.I.F.,<sup>67</sup> was a magnificent instrument, at the zenith of its efficiency. The brigades had come up fresh from six weeks' rest—an opportunity for training such as had not before been granted to any Australian division in France. A young Australian recruit,<sup>68</sup> who had lately joined, noted in his diary the manner in which his battalion marched off to the Bullecourt attack.

We reinforcements are ignorant of it all, but the older soldiers are a study. All are eager, and I have not seen fear amongst them. Like going to some great entertainment, they could not be more enthusiastic . . . Officers cast aside the iron discipline of the parade ground and now behave as men of the rank and file. . . . The spirit of cameraderie was excellent.

The Australian infantry had never seen tanks in action, and were full of characteristic curiosity to see them, and ready to follow them anywhere; and, though without information of the precise situation on the Arras front or of the intentions of the command, the regimental officers and men were for the most part fully confident of success in a thrust to meet the Third Army.

But, while the troops lay waiting for sound of the approaching tanks, the commanders and staffs a little in rear were filled with rapidly increasing anxiety. In Noreuil valley, through which the tanks were to come, no sound had yet been heard of them, and from Noreuil it would take them an hour and a half to reach their starting point for the attack. The hour for the attack was postponed,<sup>69</sup> but a grave risk now hung over the force. In the open, between Bullecourt and Quéant, was lying a great part of two brigades, which dawn

<sup>66</sup> Vol. III, p. 706.

<sup>67</sup> Captains A. Williamson, F. B. Stanton, W. R. Wadsworth, and R. W. Orr. "Before or since," noted Lieutenant Rule (14th) in a diary entry, written later, "we've never had such a combination of company commanders."

<sup>68</sup> Pte. W. D. Galloway (of Brisbane) of the 47th. In the passage quoted, the reference is to the attack on the 11th, in which the 47th took part.

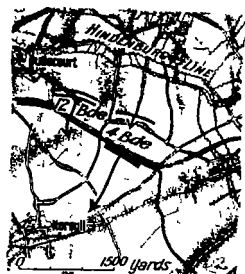
<sup>69</sup> For half-an-hour—apparently on request from Brigadier-General Brand, at about 4 to a m.

would exhibit to the enemy, clearly visible on the snow and concentrated under the muzzles of his artillery. If the troops were allowed to lie out until then, disaster must follow. The first sign of dawn was just appearing when the "chug-chug" of petrol engines was heard in Noreuil valley, and a half-exhausted officer of the tanks walked into a signal office and rang up his commander, Major Watson, who was waiting at Holmes's headquarters. The tanks were still far short of Noreuil, he said. They had been wandering across the downs in a heavy snow-storm, never quite losing their way, but following one another with extreme difficulty. The men were dead tired, and it would take at least an hour and a half to reach the starting point. Watson hurried to General Holmes, who asked whether the tanks could attack in daylight. On being informed that they would be destroyed by artillery-fire, he looked at his watch: "I think there is just time to get the boys back," he said.

It was just 5 o'clock. The brigadiers, tortured by waiting for the decision, telegraphed it instantly to the battalion headquarters on the railway. Brand's message was:

The stunt is off. Disposition as yesterday. Move.

The battalions on the embankment were hustled, by any track available, to Noreuil or the sunken roads. The troops lying out in front rose and walked back, without attempt at formation, "like a crowd from a football match." Beyond an occasional bitter oath, not much was said, but the disillusionment had been severe. The staff, which had lectured them at their training, and which had seemed to have acquired skill and experience, had been playing some idiotic game. "The heads" had evidently made a grievous error—they were fools to have expected anything else. It was then 5.20, the day had half-broken, and every man in the retirement—and every onlooker—felt it inevitable that the enemy must see them.<sup>70</sup> Just then a shower of snow swept across the landscape screening the country as it came, but two S.O.S. flares were fired by the Germans and shells



<sup>70</sup> Sunrise would be at 6.7.



presently began bursting on the line of the embankment and the neighbouring back area. Undoubtedly a barrage had been called down, but it was not especially severe, and the withdrawal was completed almost unhindered. Only on the left, on the railway line in the sector of the 48th Battalion, was there serious loss, twenty-one being killed or wounded, including a splendid leader, Major B. B. Leane, who, as second-in-command of his brother's battalion, was watching the operation.

This bombardment, however, had been called down by the German garrison of Bullecourt in consequence of an occurrence unknown to the withdrawing Australians. The 62nd British Division on the left of the Australians had, after 10 p.m. on the 9th, received from the V Corps a provisional order to push troops into Bullecourt as soon as the operations of I Anzac and of the tanks made it possible. The divisional commander in forwarding this order to his troops directed that, as well as throwing a battalion through Bullecourt<sup>71</sup> when the tanks and Australians had seized the village, "the 185th Brigade will push forward strong patrols under a barrage" simultaneously with the 4th Australian Division's attack. It is difficult to ascertain the origin of this order, which seems to have incorporated part of one of the many orders made and cancelled during the haste of these twenty-four hours. It appears that the staff of the 4th Australian Division knew nothing of it—certainly its front-line troops did not. But those of the 62nd Division carried it out to the letter. At 4.30, in the belief that the Australians were attacking, a number of strong detachments from both the 2/7th and 2/8th West Yorkshire advanced against the Hindenburg Line west of Bullecourt. On the western face of the village part of a company of the 2/7th, supported by a second company, succeeded in getting through the first belt of the entanglement, but then came under heavy machine-gun fire. The diary of the 62nd Division states:

Owing to the 4th Australian Division cancelling the order for their barrage and the forward movement of tanks, and not informing us till 4.55—25 minutes after zero—our patrols went forward unsupported.

At 5.10, finding no sign of support on either flank, the foremost patrols were ordered to withdraw, but some of those

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<sup>71</sup> By these orders this battalion was to move through Bullecourt in order to capture the Hindenburg Line farther west

beyond the Hindenburg wire could not be got out. Two Lewis gun teams were left there and were eventually killed or captured by the enemy. Two companies succeeded in establishing themselves in sunken roads close in front of the Hindenburg Line west of Bullecourt—where they were shelled by their own six-inch howitzers—with a forward post on the edge of the wire. One company, however, while lying out, as directed, in close support of the patrols, was severely fired on by machine-guns and lost heavily. The total casualties were 162.

There is no doubt that, even if the 62nd Division had omitted to notify them of its project, the staffs of the 4th Australian Division and 12th Australian Brigade should have informed the 62nd as soon as they knew that the Australian attack could not take place at the hour agreed upon, 4.30. In later stages of the war they could hardly have failed to do so. At the same time their own uncertainty consequent upon the extreme haste forced upon them by the army commander, and the inefficiency of the early tanks, rendered this an occasion upon which, if ever, such mistakes were likely.

Thus to the 62nd Division the morning's fiasco gave reason for some bitterness. To the weary reserve battalions of the 4th Brigade, as they marched back, without sleep, to Favreuil, it became a subject of grim cynical humour, ever afterwards to be known as the "Dummy Stunt" or the "Buckshee<sup>72</sup> Battle." But there was one to whom the news of the cancellation brought unmixed relief. A friend of General Birdwood's records in his diary the view expressed to him by the general after the news came through.

I am very glad it had to be postponed. I don't like it at all. The people on our left are not (far) enough up—when they get up a good deal further it will be different, but I don't like the affair at all.

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<sup>72</sup> Backsheesh—i.e., the "voluntary" fight that was "given in for nothing," along with the real battle on the next day.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE FIRST BATTLE OF BULLECOURT

THE tired reserve battalions of the 4th Australian Division had just plodded back through the mud to their quarters north of Bapaume; the exhausted tank-crews, having thrown tarpaulins over their monsters nestling into the side of the Noreuil valley, were snatching what rest they could—when the commanders of I Anzac, V Corps, and 4th Cavalry Division received orders to attend at noon with their chiefs-of-staff for a conference at General Gough's headquarters. Proceeding thither they found representatives of the Tank Battalion, the special company of engineers, and the flying corps also present, as well as the commander of the Fifth Army's artillery. General Gough, who presided, informed them that the Third Army was about to renew its attempt to seize the third German line and open the passage through it for its cavalry. It was then actually on the move, and to assist it he intended, unless the Germans first retired, to deliver at 4.30 next morning, April 11th, the attack with tanks which had been cancelled in the early hours of the 10th.

General Birdwood urged several objections. Most of his arguments had already been overruled, but the late arrival of the tanks had afforded strong additional evidence of the danger involved in relying upon them as the main instrument, and Birdwood, besides stressing his general doubt of their capacity, contended that it would be difficult for them to take up correctly aligned positions, and that, if their alignment was wrong, they might lead the infantry astray. The case for the tanks, on the other hand, was that the failure that morning was due solely to special circumstances, and both the tank commander and General Gough expressed themselves as confident that at least seventy-five per cent of them would reach the enemy's trenches. Here again both spoke with previous experience, of which the Anzac Corps, until that morning, had none.

Birdwood and White, however, persisted, and were under the impression that their arguments were meeting with success. The army commander was evidently trying to make up his mind as to the proper course of action, when he was called to the telephone and left the room. A few minutes later he returned, and in a decisive tone informed the Anzac leaders that he had been speaking to Haig's chief-of-staff, who had given him a decision from the Commander-in-Chief—that the attack must be made, the project being a very important and urgent one by which Haig set great store. This message—which was taken as Haig's answer to the Anzac leaders,<sup>1</sup> of whose general attitude he was aware—put an end to their opposition. The scheme was interpreted in a formal order issued by Gough at 11.15 that night, in which, after mentioning that 11,000 prisoners and over 100 guns had already been taken by the First and Third Armies, he states:

Third Army troops are north and south-west of Wancourt, and are holding the front trench of the Hindenburg Line (in their sector). Infantry of the VII Corps has been ordered to advance at 6 a.m. to-morrow to the green line (the original *fourth* objective), which should be reached by 9 a.m. Infantry will be followed by cavalry ready to seize an opportunity to break through.<sup>2</sup> It is most important that the Fifth Army should gain a footing in the Drocourt-Quéant line so to act as an advance guard with Third Army. After carrying out tasks already ordered, I Anzac Corps and 4th Cavalry Division will make every endeavour to do so and will be vigorously supported by V Corps.



Certain alterations were made in the plan. In particular, after Bullecourt was cleared, six tanks were to come under the orders of the 62nd British Division and assist it in advancing to Hendecourt. The most important change, however, was finally made in the afternoon at a conference

<sup>1</sup> Birdwood afterwards referred to it as a message from Haig to himself.

<sup>2</sup> Allenby's intention is shown by his telegram sent to all corps of the Third Army at 7.40 on April 10: "Third Army pursuing beaten enemy; risks must be taken; isolated detachments must not delay general progress." In this, however, he misread the situation. The enemy had already recovered, and the opportunity for such tactics had passed.

between the commanders of the 4th Australian and 62nd Divisions at General Holmes's headquarters, General Birdwood, the tank commander, and Brigadier-General Rosenthal of the 4th Australian Division's artillery also being present. It now being known, from the patrol reports of the previous night,<sup>3</sup> that the wire of the Hindenburg Line was at least partly cut, the Australian commanders decided that the infantry should go forward fifteen minutes after the tanks, without waiting for any signal from them. This meant that the infantry, or part of it, might have to attack the Hindenburg Line in spite of a breakdown of some of the tanks, but it carried the immense advantage that the action of the infantry was no longer uncertain through dependence on signals which might not be given, or might be given in one part and not in another. Moreover, the attack on this occasion was definitely ordered—it was not, in the I Anzac Corps, dependent upon patrols being sent out early in the night to discover whether the Germans had retired.<sup>4</sup>

Other arrangements also were more precise than previously. Diagrams of the action of each tank at each stage were circulated. Six would form up in front of each brigade. Of these the four<sup>5</sup> in the centre would attack the otherwise unattacked portion of the Hindenburg Line in the depression between the two brigades, enabling these forces to join hands after seizing their objectives on either spur. The two outermost tanks on each flank would turn outwards as they reached respectively the first and second trenches which, from their resemblance to the formidable German second line at Pozières, became known as "O.G.1" (the German front line) and



*Proposed advance of tanks.*

<sup>3</sup> See p. 276-7.

<sup>4</sup> The orders of the V Corps, on the other hand, provided that strong patrols should again be sent out, and the operation was made contingent on their reporting the German line held.

<sup>5</sup> The number was reduced by the tank commander to three, the tank at Achiet not being repaired in time to participate.

"O.G.2" (the German support line<sup>6</sup>). The two tanks on the right, after assisting the infantry to block each trench, would pass along the wire of the two lines, crushing it down and keeping engaged the enemy on that flank, and thence down the wire of the "Balcony Trench" near Quéant and back to Noreuil. The two on the left would similarly wheel outwards, and, together with the two next to them, would suppress the Germans in Bullecourt, enabling the Australians to enter it and afterwards leading the advance of the 62nd Division on Bullecourt and the line west of it. In the second stage these four tanks with the two next to them would lead the 62nd Division to Hendecourt, and all the others, except the two which would have returned to Noreuil, would move with the Australian infantry to Riencourt.

The artillery programme was arranged to cover these extensive operations but, to enable the tanks to effect a surprise, and to operate ahead of the infantry, there would be no creeping barrage for the infantry or preliminary bombardment of the objective. On the left flank Bullecourt would again be drenched with gas at 1 a.m. and the heavy artillery would shell it all night, but there would be no special bombardment at 4.30 when the tanks started. The shelling of Bullecourt by the "heavies" would merely continue steadily until 4.45, when the tanks would reach the Hindenburg Line. At that stage down would come the field artillery barrage on both flanks (with smoke shells on the Quéant side). At 5 o'clock the barrage on the Bullecourt flank would finally cease, in order to enable the allotted tanks, followed by one of the two Australian battalions that had attacked on the left (the 46th) to enter Bullecourt. At 5.15 the barrage would be lifted from Riencourt also, in order to let two battalions (13th and 15th) of the right brigade continue the thrust to, and around, that village. The barrage must advance beyond them, far into the German back area; but, in case the later stages of the operation failed and the Australians were able to seize only the Hindenburg Line, a barrage around that position was provisionally arranged, which they could call down by firing the S.O.S. signal.

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<sup>6</sup> The names were originally given to part of the German second-line system on the Somme after its capture by the British in July 1916. "O G" constantly signified "Old German" trenches.

The plan of co-operation with the 62nd British Division was set forth in the orders of the 12th Australian Infantry Brigade, as follows:

At 5 a.m. four tanks will enter Bullecourt. The 46th Bn. will follow these and mop up the village.<sup>7</sup> As soon as the 46th Bn. enters the village three green flares will be sent up to inform the brigade on our left (185th, of 62nd Division) so that it may come forward.

In all orders it was made clear that the arrival of the tanks and Australians in Bullecourt was a necessary preliminary to the 62nd Division's attack,<sup>8</sup> since the wire before Bullecourt was known not to have been cut.

As the decision to repeat the attempt was not made until early in the afternoon, the arrangements for it, though better considered, were almost as hurried as on the previous day. The warning order, received by the battalions about 4 p.m.,<sup>9</sup> informed them that the general plan would be the same. All commanders issued their provisional orders and instructions accordingly,<sup>10</sup> but during the night these instructions were continually modified by messages embodying the revised arrangements made by the divisional staff in conferences with the artillery and tank commanders and higher staffs. A time-table was issued and subsequently amended. It was not until last-minute conferences held by each of the brigadiers with their battalion commanders at midnight that the final changes were known. The reserve battalions again made their five-mile march up from the Bapaume area. Snow was falling, and most of the troops were very tired.<sup>11</sup> All felt certain that the enemy had

<sup>7</sup> By General Holmes's orders, when the 46th moved on to Bullecourt another battalion was to be held ready to take the place of the 46th in the captured O.G.I. The 47th Battalion was designated by the brigadier for this purpose.

<sup>8</sup> The I Anzac orders of April 10, for example, state: "The V Corps is not to take action until I Anzac has seized Bullecourt. . . . When the tanks have reached Bullecourt, and our troops have entered the village, the 62nd Division will be informed at once."

<sup>9</sup> The message—that the operation would take place next day at the same place and on the same general lines—was received by the 12th Brigade at 3.42 p.m., and by the battalions shortly afterwards.

<sup>10</sup> In the 4th Brigade they were issued verbally at conferences held at brigade headquarters.

<sup>11</sup> A newly joined recruit, Private Gallwey of the 47th Battalion, has left on record his feelings as late in the night, worn out, he struggled into Noreuil valley with his battalion: "I carried my rifle in my left hand, just holding it by the sling and trailing the butt through the mud. It was too much energy to carry it any other way. Knees were giving way, and I was plodding on like in a dream. . . . Of what use would I be to fight to-night. My body was in a wretched state of weakness."

seen their withdrawal on the previous morning and so been put on the alert. Nevertheless, most were confident that the attempt would succeed. Airmen of the 15th Squadron<sup>12</sup> had searched the Bullecourt area for signs of any German retirement during the afternoon, but found none. The 62nd Division noted that the German shelling of its front, especially of the railway line, became more active at dusk, and broke out at intervals throughout the night.

The Australian infantry were earlier in position this time, the front lines forming up before the arrival of the tanks, which were to be lined out by 3 o'clock. The snow lay somewhat thicker than on the night before, a thin sheet covering most of the expanse, except along trodden roads, where it was churned to mud. The officers detailed to guide the tanks included some of the most reliable in the force. They waited at the rendezvous, near a level crossing on the railway, but it was nearly 3—the time when the tanks' assembly should have been completed—before their sound was heard. Gough's order that machine-gun fire must be arranged for so as to drown the noise of their engines had, in a vague form, percolated through to the machine-gun companies, but, through lack of experience with tanks, its full intention was missed. General Brand of the 4th Brigade had during the night telephoned to headquarters of the 4th Division asking if artillery-fire had been arranged for, and was informed that precautions had been taken to drown the noise. Actually, however, by request of the tank commander, the artillery was not to increase its fire until the tanks reached the Hindenburg Line, and concealment therefore depended entirely on machine-guns. Of the machine-guns on the left, three, of the 12th Company, had been detailed to open fire as soon as tanks were heard approaching; on the right the 6th Company afterwards reported that "*starting at 4.30 a.m.*"—the hour for the final advance by the tanks—eight of its guns kept up a barrage at a rate of 1,500 rounds an hour for two hours. The artillery of both sides was firing only fitfully, and the result was that, during more than an hour before "zero" as well as after it, the sound of the engines was—in spite of a certain amount of disturbance—startlingly clear. The

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<sup>12</sup> Attached to the V. Corps.



Australian scouts who were out checking the tapes could hear it, and among the crews of the tanks when they reached the rendezvous the chance of the enemy being thus warned was the chief topic of conversation.

It was hoped and expected that this day, as the tanks had merely to make the short journey from Noreuil valley, they would be promptly on the starting line, and that their movements, upon which Gough's whole scheme turned, would be made with precision. But from the first these expectations were disappointed. It was 3 o'clock before the first tank arrived at the rendezvous, and 3.20 before, guided by Captain Jacka, it had reached its starting line ahead of the 4th Brigade, already lying out in the snow. Jacka asked the subaltern in charge whether from this point his tank could, as arranged, reach the Hindenburg Line in fifteen minutes. The reply was that it was impossible. Seeing that this rendered it probable that the infantry would reach the entanglement before the tanks, which were to break it down, Jacka on his return towards the rendezvous took the officer with him to the commanders of the 14th and 16th Battalions, whose headquarters were in the railway cutting there. On learning the position, Colonels Peck and Drake Brockman telephoned asking that the tanks might commence their attack a quarter of an hour earlier than had been arranged. It was then, however, too late to make the alteration, and General Holmes answered that they "must stick to the programme." By this time two more tanks had arrived. They were led out by Jacka, the three lying in line, with 100 yards between them, 150 yards ahead of the infantry. A report was received that a fourth—apparently one of the two that were to act on the extreme right—had broken down in the back area. The fifth and sixth, understood to be some of those intended to attack in the gap between the two brigades—were shown by Jacka a level crossing, which had been selected as the best route to the starting point; but one of the two crossed elsewhere,<sup>13</sup> headed into the sunken road forming the advanced position of the 4th Brigade, and stuck there with its nose into the farther bank. The other was temporarily stopped by engine trouble a little short of the sunken road.

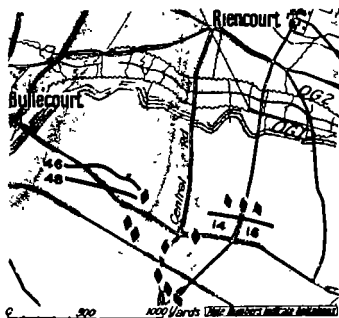
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<sup>13</sup> It seems probable that the subaltern in the tank, realising that he was late, attempted a short cut to save time.

Thus, in the sector of the 4th Brigade, at 4.30 only three of the six tanks<sup>14</sup>—one "male" (with six-pounder guns) and two "females" (armed with machine-guns only)—were in position. At 4.23 German shells had begun to burst about them, and Jacka realised that the Germans, although they could not at that hour see the tanks, had heard their approach. The five tanks for the front of the 12th Brigade were even more behind time. At 4 a.m. several were still in rear of the railway embankment, and it is doubtful if any had reached the actual starting point at the time laid down for their advance.

But, although this unpunctuality caused tense anxiety to those infantry commanders who were aware of it, most of the troops, who in the dark could make out little of what was passing, were in keen spirits. At 4.30 the 4th Brigade's three tanks moved forward. The sound of their engines was heard intermittently. A scattered shell-fire descended, but few of the waiting troops were hit except in the 4th Light Trench Mortar Battery waiting in the sunken road. Here a heavy shell burst, killing and wounding the crews of several mortars. Immediately afterwards a tank which had stopped twenty yards in rear began to fire in the direction of the enemy lines, killing an N.C.O. and two men who were carrying the trench-mortar bombs. These occurrences robbed the 4th Brigade of the use of the three trench-mortars allotted to support its right flank in the attack.

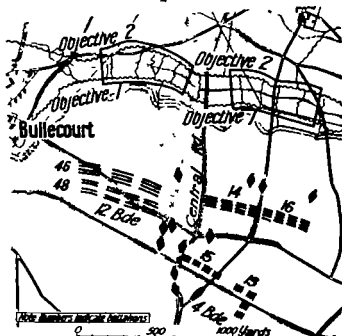
At 4.35 a green flare rising from Bullecourt gave evidence that some sentry in that bastion had seen an advancing tank. At 4.36 a second flare rose in the same place. At 4.40 both green and golden flares glittered constantly in that direction, and an increasing fire of machine-guns began without



*Position of tanks, as far as known, at the appointed starting time.*

<sup>14</sup> Two of the three central tanks are included in this calculation, the other being counted with the tanks of the 12th Brigade. For the subsequent action of these tanks see pp. 314-7, 347.

disturbing the order of the waiting infantry. A South Australian scout,<sup>15</sup> who was assisting in the alignment of the 12th Brigade, has stated that what impressed him at that time, when flares or shell-bursts afforded a view over the ground, was the splendid dressing of the two brigades extended in long lines as far as the eye could see, with supporting companies in denser formation behind.<sup>16</sup> To the front there had so far been observed no coloured signal of alarm.



At 4.45, punctual to the second, the 4th Brigade, in the right sector, moved off. Never in its history—at Quinn's,

**The  
4th Brigade's  
attack**

Courtney's, or in the Kaiajik Dere in Gallipoli, or since at Pozières and Mouquet Farm—had this magnificent body faced a more formidable task, and never had it been more capable of the attempt. It is probable that no other brigade in the A.I.F. ever possessed quite such a group of regimental leaders. The foremost battalion—16th, Western Australia—on the right was led into action by Major Percy Black, the old prospector, known from Yilgarn to the Murchison, who as corporal, twice wounded, had kept his machine-gun in action for a week at the Landing—a man who had never failed, and whom some admirers (without his knowledge) were wont to cite for the distinction of being "the bravest in the A.I.F." Behind him, leading a company of the 13th (New South Wales), was Captain "Harry" Murray—Black's better known comrade of

<sup>15</sup> Private Arnold. (Lieut. T. F. Arnold, M.C., D.C.M., M.M.; 48th Bn. Sheep farmer; of Ceduna, S. Aust.; b. St. Francis Island, S. Aust., 5 May, 1897.)

<sup>16</sup> The same feature was noted by the Germans in Bullecourt as the attack began to advance (see *History of 120th I.R.*). In the 4th Brigade the two leading battalions (16th and 14th) each had all four companies in line, each company on a one platoon front—i.e., with one platoon in each wave. The waves followed each other at 25 yards' distance. The supporting battalions (13th and 15th) were at first in artillery formation, as shown in the marginal sketch. The formation of the 13th was designed for the enclosing of Riencourt. In the 12th Brigade, the 46th advanced with three companies in line, the fourth being held in support; the 48th followed, on a two-company front.

Gallipoli and Mouquet Farm—himself formerly a timber-getter, to whom a vote of the A.I.F. would probably have awarded that invidious distinction. The 14th (Victoria), advancing on the left of the 16th, was led by the four splendid company commanders already mentioned.<sup>17</sup> The 15th (Queensland and Tasmania), which followed the 14th, was the same which had held the spear-head of Anzac, Quinn's Post, and was now commanded by McSharry, the former adjutant of that post.<sup>18</sup>

The first waves of the brigade had 700 yards to go before reaching the German trenches, and the supporting battalions from the railway embankment<sup>19</sup> over 1,200. The Germans were already laying down a scattered barrage—partly in direct enfilade, from Quéant<sup>20</sup>—and whenever a shell burst or a white flare rose it showed the area as a plane of well-spaced steadily moving figures with one or two tanks near their head. Half-way across, the first wave came over a gentle crest into sight of the Hindenburg Line. At this point it overtook two of the tanks, both stationary, one in front of the 14th, and one in front of the 16th. The latter was heading to the right flank, but on the troops shouting, it turned, moved towards the Hindenburg Line, opened fire with its machine-guns, and stopped again. The nearest part of the 16th also stopped, since the tank was firing over the ground which the troops must cross. At this stage a subaltern of the 16th, Lieutenant Aarons,<sup>21</sup> told the officer that the infantry must proceed without it, the lines of the 16th swept on, the tank following behind them.

It was about this moment, at 4.50, that spectators in the rear area saw the first German coloured flare, a red, fired from the direction of Riencourt, straight ahead of the advance. It was followed at 4.52 by a second, and five minutes later red and green lights and sheaves of white flares rose and fell there continuously. At 5 o'clock they almost as suddenly

<sup>17</sup> See p. 281. Captain Jacka, being its intelligence officer, was not leading troops in this fight.

<sup>18</sup> See Vol. II, p. 201.

<sup>19</sup> See Vol. XII, plate 318.

<sup>20</sup> This was not ineffective. One shell from Quéant destroyed an entire section of the 15th Battalion.

<sup>21</sup> Capt. D. S. Aarons, M.C.; 16th Bn. Business manager; of Fremantle, W. Aust., and Melbourne; b. Donald, Vic., 1 Aug., 1885.

diminished.<sup>22</sup> It was undoubtedly in these minutes that the 4th Brigade's attack was detected by the German garrison of the Hindenburg Line. As the troops neared the great wire belts, the fire of rifles and machine-guns had suddenly intensified. The wire (as one man said) "seemed to swarm with fireflies" where the bullets glanced from it. Flares began to illuminate the snow-covered battlefield almost as brightly as daylight. A German field battery in Bullecourt was firing eastwards directly across the front, and another westwards from Quéant, and the oncoming tanks also attracted such a storm of small-arms fire that men watching from close in rear could at times see their shapes outlined by the sparks of the bullets that rattled against their sides. They were still short of the wire, and the contingency deeply feared by the Anzac leaders, and so confidently rejected by the army commander, had happened. The 4th Brigade was facing intense machine-gun fire along insufficiently broken entanglements without a single tank ahead of it to clear a passage.

At this crisis of the operation, if the troops had not been prepared to meet almost insuperable difficulty, and had not specially strained their wills to meet it, the shock must have broken the attack. Their officers gave a fine lead to their determination. Major Black, who till then had moved in his proper place with the rear wave of his company, at this juncture went straight to his men at the wire, saying "Come on, boys, b—— the tanks!" This battle was to be the triumph of his life, although he entered it with an all too well founded belief that he would not survive. After the conference at midnight with Colonels Peck and Drake Brockman, he had said quietly—"Well, good-bye colonel—I mayn't come back, but we'll get the Hindenburg Line." Now under a hurricane fusillade, he led his men through the wire.

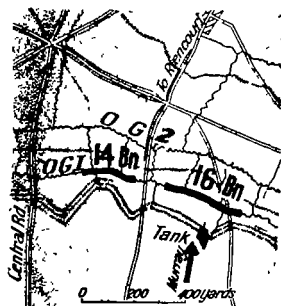
They found it, if anything, less difficult than was expected. One big gap had been made in it opposite the left centre of the brigade front,<sup>23</sup> and in some other parts numerous shells had so broken or loosened the strands that it was easily possible to struggle through. At other points again, it was almost intact, and the only chance was to move along it,

<sup>22</sup> An Australian observer, noting this fact in his diary, adds: "Have the Germans run?"

<sup>23</sup> Where Captain Jacka had examined it on the night of the 9th.

searching for one of the openings left for patrols or made by shells. Captain Murray, with the first wave of the supporting 13th, on running into the machine-gun fire, had shouted to his men to lie down for a moment while this storm swept over, but as he lay he caught a glimpse of the 16th 300 yards ahead struggling through the entanglement under fire of machine-guns from right and left, which tore great gaps in the line. "Come on, men," he shouted, "the 16th are getting hell!" and led his company swiftly on.

By the time the 13th reached the wire, the foremost tank was part of the way through it. Murray tried to squeeze his way past the tank's left side, but was caught between it and the wire. He then made round its right, and in doing so caught sight of an active enemy machine-gun ten yards away in a sap which ran out through the wire. Its three gunners, true to the magnificent tradition of their corps, undeterred by the monster beside them or by the opposing infantry far beyond and all round them, with death certain and imminent,



were maintaining continuous fire on the leading companies of the advancing 13th. They were at once shot down, but their bravery had caused the Australians grievous loss.<sup>24</sup> A great part of the 16th was left dead or wounded in the wire; and by the time Murray's troops got through, his three platoon commanders and his runner had been wounded, himself hit but not hurt, and—according to his estimate—all but forty of his company killed or wounded.

O.G.1 was a very wide, deep trench, with earthen walls, well cut regular bays, massive traverses, a few deep dugouts of the ordinary type, and numerous shafts of varying depth where the entrances for dugouts had just been started. The 16th had captured this trench before the 13th arrived, most of the garrison abandoning it. Nevertheless by

<sup>24</sup> In Murray's opinion, this machine-gun alone accounted for 30 of his men. Lance-Corporal P. A. Burge (of Bendigo, Vic.) of the 14th observed that all men who entered the track of this tank were being mown down by machine-gun fire, and led his section through the half-broken wire farther west—to be himself wounded on the edge of the trench, by a bomb. Murray's runner was Lance-Corporal C. W. Stewart (of Pelaw Main, N.S.W.).

bombing the dugouts about sixty prisoners had been taken, and these were sent back at once.<sup>25</sup> Major Black had wasted no time there, but had almost immediately led out his second wave to complete the 16th's task by seizing the support line, O.G.2, which ran roughly parallel 170 yards away. More than half-way across lay the entanglement protecting it, a comparatively narrow belt, but entirely uncut. The troops clustered along this, and the Germans, who were holding O.G.2 in strength, opened heavy fire. Many of the Western Australians were hit here; others sought the nearest shell-hole and lay waiting for instructions. But Black led those with him along the entanglement until he found an opening, passed the survivors through it, and ordered his runner to return to Colonels Peck and Drake Brockman at the railway. "Tell them," he said, "the first objective is gained and I am pushing on to the second."<sup>26</sup> As he finished the words, he fell, shot through the head.

But his men rushed the second trench, bombing and shooting at the enemy, many of whom broke. Murray, arriving about this time at O.G.1, could see fighting in progress in the second trench, and, knowing that in case of such trouble the 13th had orders to assist the 16th, he immediately took forward his company to join in the struggle. Other parts of the 16th were now finding their way to O.G.2 through the numerous saps which, like the rungs of a ladder, connected the two trenches of the Hindenburg Line. (There were thirteen of these cross-trenches between the "Balcony" Trench and Bullecourt, and for convenience they are named in this narrative by the letters A-M). Other companies of the 13th, from which much of the fire had been diverted by the leading companies, were pouring into O.G.1, Captain Gardiner<sup>27</sup> directing the troops near him through a clear track in the wire made by the leading tank, which by then was

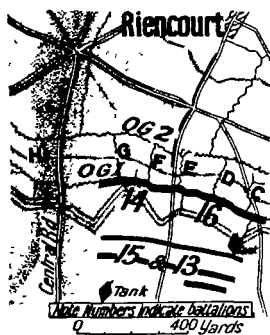
<sup>25</sup> Forty-two reached the railway—34 of the 11th company, 124th I.R., 6 of a *minenwerfer* detachment, and 2 machine-gunners. The rest were cut down by German fire.

<sup>26</sup> According to the report of the 16th Battalion, this message reached the railway at 5.16. The runner, Private C. Ellis (of Perth, W. Aust.; died 16 June, 1927), returned to the front, but did not come back. Several other runners, including Private F. B. Johnson (of Sydney), 13th Battalion, made the double journey.

<sup>27</sup> Capt. G. G. Gardiner, 13th Bn. Public servant; of Chatswood, N.S.W.; b. 9 April, 1891.

approaching the first trench.<sup>28</sup> These troops at once moved to O.G.2, those who crossed the open losing heavily, but those who moved through the cross-trenches reaching it without difficulty. Germans could be seen fleeing in almost every direction—down their trenches to the east, across country towards Riencourt and Bullecourt; even from Riencourt to the back area. Australians knelt on the parapets sniping at them, and Lewis gunners rattled off a drum or two. Murray, who at once hurried down O.G.2 to see the right flank established, overtook some bombers of the 16th far down the trench, still bombing and told them to stop. "Oh! We're going a long way yet," they answered cheerily, but he repeated his order, and an officer of the 16th, who then came up, took charge of the flank.

The left flank of the 4th Brigade—the 14th Battalion, with the 15th behind it—had almost precisely the same experience as the right. Its troops were guided on their right by the track from Noreuil to Riencourt, and on their left by the bank of the half-sunken road<sup>29</sup> which ran along the depression that separated the brigades. This road (which in this narrative will be called the "Central Road") should have lain well to the left of the 4th Brigade's advance, but some stray platoons of the 13th, which should have been far to the right, actually advanced beside it, finally running into deadly machine-gun fire, from which few escaped. The 14th Battalion appears to have kept direction, but, after advancing through scattered machine-gun and artillery fire, when near the German wire suddenly came into the same withering fusillade as the 16th. The only tank seen had been left far behind, and the wire, though thoroughly destroyed opposite part of the right, and elsewhere damaged in places, was practically intact on the left. A large proportion of officers and men were shot as they made for and struggled through the openings and crossed



Situation when 14th Bn.  
entered O.G.1.

<sup>28</sup> The wire lay 50 yards from the trench.

<sup>29</sup> It had a bank along its eastern side only.



the fifty yards space between the wire and the first trench.<sup>30</sup> Some were shot or bombed on its parapet, but O.G.1 was seized, and before the 15th came up, the 14th was already advancing to the second trench.

On the right, where the first trench had been so pounded by heavy artillery that Captain Wadsworth<sup>31</sup> did not recognise it, O.G.2 was reached by parts of the 14th and 15th—as by the 16th and 13th farther to the right—both through communication trenches and over the top. In the centre and on the left, however, the advancing parties came against a completely intact belt of wire, and on the left, in addition, were swept back by annihilating fire from German rifles and machine-guns in O.G.2 and near the bank of the Central Road.<sup>32</sup> Attempting to reach the second wire and trench, Lieutenant Gower<sup>33</sup> (14th) and Captain Leslie<sup>34</sup> (15th) were shot as they clambered out; Lieutenant Ingram<sup>35</sup> (15th) was driven back by the loss of most of his platoon before they had gone a dozen yards; Captain Stanton<sup>36</sup> (14th) was killed leading a rush. Many who reached the wire could not get through—some were shot down, others sheltered in craters and there

<sup>30</sup> It is probably not far from correct to estimate that at least a quarter, possibly a third, of the whole attacking force was killed or wounded at or near the first entanglement. Officers believed to have been hit before reaching the trench are—13th Battalion: Lieutenants N. J. Browne and W. U. Clasper, the latter mortally; 14th: Captains R. W. Orr and P. McCallum, and Lieutenants A. J. McQuiggin, J. A. Mitchell, and L. H. Mullett; 15th: Lieutenants W. D. Kenyon and J. L. Drybrough; 16th: Captain V. Tucker, and Lieutenants G. D. McLean, K. L. Johnson, L. G. Glowrey, and J. P. Courtney. The total would, however, probably be twice as great, since particulars are available for only half the casualties. (Browne, who died of wounds on 22 March, 1918, belonged to Albury, N.S.W.; Clasper to Chatswood, N.S.W.; Orr to Footscray, Vic.; McCallum to Toorak and Birregurra, Vic.; McQuiggin to Picton, N.S.W.; Mitchell to Melbourne; Mullett to East Malvern, Vic.; Kenyon to Toowoomba, Q'land; Drybrough to Townsville and Hughenden district, Q'land; Tucker to Ballarat, Vic., and Broken Hill, N.S.W.; McLean to North Norwood, S. Aust.; Johnson to Harvey, W. Aust.; Glowrey to Perth, W. Aust.; Courtney to Bruce Rock and Perth, W. Aust. McLean died on 16 July, 1923.)

<sup>31</sup> Lieut.-Col. W. R. Wadsworth, D.S.O., M.C.; 14th Bn. Engineer; of Castlemaine, Vic.; b. Castlemaine, 17 July, 1892.

<sup>32</sup> The 16th, now reaching O.G.2, observed to their left a German machine-gun post firing from O.G.2 on the 14th attempting to cross. Captain Somerville (16th) caused a Lewis gun to be mounted to shoot down these Germans, but the Lewis gunner was hit. The Germans, however, were shortly afterwards shot down, apparently from O.G.1.

<sup>33</sup> Capt. O. C. D. Gower, 14th Bn. Clerk; of Sandringham, Vic.; b. Edithburg, S. Aust., 18 Jan., 1881.

<sup>34</sup> Capt. F. A. Leslie, 15th Bn. Stock and station agent, and accountant; of Brighton and Orbost, Vic.; b. Hawthorn, Vic., 21 Dec., 1887. Killed in action, 11 April, 1917.

<sup>35</sup> Capt. J. Ingram, 15th Bn. Clerk; of Cairns, Q'land; b. Croydon, Q'land, 10 Jan., 1890.

<sup>36</sup> Capt. F. B. Stanton, 14th Bn. Bank clerk; of Melbourne; b. Stawell, Vic., 9 Sept., 1894. Killed in action, 11 April, 1917.

awaited instructions, or, catching sight of one of the cross-trenches, scrambled towards it. After several such deadly repulses, Captain Williamson,<sup>37</sup> it is said, in an effort to give another lead to those around him, climbed out and went forward, practically alone, to be killed—the third to fall of that famous team of company commanders, since Captain Orr<sup>38</sup> had been killed in No-Man's Land.<sup>39</sup>

Nevertheless a handful of the 14th under Lieutenant Thompson<sup>40</sup> succeeded in capturing this part of O.G.2, entering it through a cross-trench or by an opening beneath the wire, and were quickly joined by Captain Dunworth and some of the 15th.

The whole of the 4th Brigade's objective in the Hindenburg Line had thus been captured, but it remained for the 14th Battalion, on the left of the brigade, to extend its flank westwards to meet the 12th Brigade, which would likewise be reaching out with its right from the section to be captured by it, 400 yards farther to the west. None of the three tanks which were to have seized the intervening gap had reached it, though one was now in the wire. The junction must therefore be attempted by bombing, and a mixed party, including many bombers of the 14th, under Lieutenant Parsonage<sup>41</sup> (13th) and Company Sergeant-Major Emerson<sup>42</sup> (15th), accordingly began to bomb westward down O.G.1.<sup>43</sup> The stage had now also been reached at which, according to the original orders, the 13th and 15th Battalions should pass on and seize and enclose Riencourt, whose nearest houses, bordered by tall,

<sup>37</sup> Capt. A. Williamson, 14th Bn. School teacher; of Toongabbie, Vic.; b. Cowwarr, Vic., 1894. Killed in action, 11 April, 1917.

<sup>38</sup> Capt. R. W. Orr, 14th Bn. Accountant, of Footscray, Vic.; b. Footscray. 5 Feb., 1890. Killed in action, 11 April, 1917.

<sup>39</sup> It seems probable that at the second obstacle, the wire of O.G.2, there were hit about a quarter of the force then remaining. There were killed or wounded here, in the 13th Battalion—Captain D. P. Wells; 14th: Captains A. Williamson and F. B. Stanton, and Lieutenants S. B. Thompson and O. C. D. Gower; 15th: Captain F. A. Leslie; 16th: Major P. C. H. Black; 4th Machine Gun Company: Lieutenant W. J. Cox. Many other officers were certainly hit at the same stage. Lieutenant E. Binnington (15th) records that most of his platoon were killed or wounded in passing this wire. (Wells belonged to Newcastle, N.S.W.; Black to Beremboke, Vic.; Cox to Essendon, Vic.; Binnington to Maryborough, Q'land.)

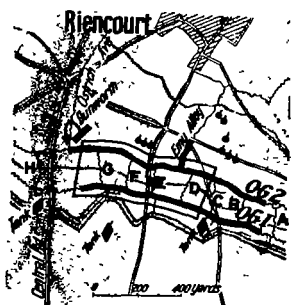
<sup>40</sup> Lieut. S. B. Thompson, 14th Bn. Glazier; of St. Kilda, Vic.; b. Dimboola, Vic., 5 Oct., 1893. Killed in action, 11 April, 1917.

<sup>41</sup> Capt. W. Parsonage, M.C.; 13th Bn. Commercial traveller; of Sydney; b. Woollahra, N.S.W., 15 Nov., 1892.

<sup>42</sup> C.S.M. C. T. Emerson, M.M. (No. 2361; 15th Bn.). Labourer; of Petrie, Q'land; b. Shotts, Scotland, 6 Jan., 1893. (Captain Dunworth, seeing Lieutenant Kenyon wounded in No-Man's Land, had placed Emerson in charge of Kenyon's platoon.)

<sup>43</sup> Captain A. Lanagan (13th) was at an early stage in general charge here. Later Captain Wadsworth (14th), after consultation with Murray, sent fifty men to reinforce this flank.

dark, leafless trees; stood out 440 yards away, slightly higher than the captured position. A certain number of the 13th and 15th, without waiting for further instruction, proceeded with this attempt. From the centre of the 4th Brigade's new front in O.G.2 a newly-dug communication trench (the German "Calwer Graben," afterwards known to the British as "Emu Alley") ran towards Riencourt, and just outside its left flank, in the gap between the brigades, another ("Cannstatter Graben"—"Ostrich Avenue"). The latter was to have been taken by the central tanks, but Captain Dunworth (15th) immediately upon reaching O.G.2 called on the men near him to follow him and seize it.<sup>44</sup> Charging across the open beyond O.G.2, they were met by deadly fire from a machine-gun near the cross-roads. The Germans in Ostrich Avenue ran, and Dunworth reached it, but most of his men had been killed, and he himself was wounded. He crawled back along it to O.G.2, and the Avenue does not appear to have been thereafter held by the Australians. Along Emu Alley, on the other hand, a party under Captain Somerville<sup>45</sup> (16th) made its way for 150 yards until they came out upon an open road which crossed it 250 yards from Riencourt. Beyond this there were Germans. Somerville therefore established a post at the crossing with orders to hold the trench to that point.<sup>46</sup> A number of scattered men appear to have pushed on across the open until brought to a stop by a narrow but continuous belt of barbed-wire erected by the enemy as a protection for his artillery. Here, as it was now daylight, German machine-guns firing from Riencourt forced them to



Position of 4th Brigade, 5.30 a.m. The rectangle shows its objective in the Hindenburg Line.

<sup>44</sup> Some were men of the 14th, and told him their orders were to hold O.G.2—but they followed him nevertheless.

<sup>45</sup> Capt. R. S. Somerville, D.S.O., M.C.; 16th Bn. Station employee; of Kooringa, S. Aust.; b. Parkside, S. Aust. 18 Nov. 1893.

<sup>46</sup> Somerville then returned to O.G.2, of part of which he took charge, endeavouring to organise the bomb-supply. The efforts in Emu Alley appear to have been led at different times by Lieutenants J. R. Gallagher (13th) and M. Walton (16th), and Corporal W. F. de C. Patten (13th). Lieutenant B. C. J. Rose (13th) was there for a time, and the trench was visited by Captain H. W. Murray (13th). (Gallagher belonged to Lismore, N.S.W.; Walton to Moora, W. Aust.; Patten to Sydney, Rose to Homebush, N.S.W.)

shelter, some in craters, others along the bank of a road leading to the Moulin Sans Souci; some managed to withdraw, others were killed, and some were afterwards captured.<sup>47</sup>

But most of the officers of the 13th and 15th now reaching O.G.2 at once realised that an attempt to continue the advance across the open would be futile. After the death of Major Black, many officers from all parts of the brigade sector, when they could spare the time from actual fighting, tended naturally to seek out and consult Captain Murray for direction which would unite their effort. Murray was not the sole or senior company commander in O.G.2—many fine leaders, including Captains Gardiner and Fletcher (13th), Wadsworth (14th), and Somerville and Hummerston<sup>48</sup> (16th) were still actively directing; but he was the leader best known to all the brigade, and after an impassioned search for the body of Major Black, his old comrade, he had made, as was his custom,<sup>49</sup> a swift survey from flank to flank of the position occupied. So when Lieutenants Ingram (15th), Stones<sup>50</sup> (13th), and others asked him if they should go on towards Riencourt, he told them that, through failure of the tanks, loss of men, and lack of bombs and ammunition, an attempt to advance farther was, in his opinion, out of the question—the task was now to hold on. Both O.G.1 and O.G.2 were duly blocked on the right, by pulling down sandbags into the trench and revetting them with a few sheets of galvanised iron found near by. Several hundred yards farther along both trenches in that direction, as daylight increased and the barrage eased, the enemy garrison could be seen in crowds, and a party was also observed occupying shell-holes between O.G.1 and 2 just beyond the Australian flank. They counter-attacked at once, intermittent showers of small egg-bombs, thrown over two traverses of the trench, falling around the Australian barricades. But Captain Gardiner (13th), who now took charge of the right

<sup>47</sup> The facts here stated as to the advance beyond O.G.2 have been doubted, but the evidence of men returned from captivity and of German historians, as well as a German photograph showing Australian dead upon this part of the ground, afford confirmation.

<sup>48</sup> Capt. H. S. Hummerston, M.C.; 16th Bn. Sleeper cutter; of Kalamunda, W. Aust.; b. Semaphore, S. Aust., 24 June, 1890. Died 20 Aug., 1926.

<sup>49</sup> He had done the same at Mouquet Farm and Stormy Trench.

<sup>50</sup> Lieut. W. Stones, 13th Bn. Farmer and grazier; of Inglewood, Cassilis, N.S.W.; b. Pirron Yallock, Vic., 3 Sept., 1877.

flank in O.G.2, found that the Australians throwing Mills grenades—much more deadly missiles, though of less range—easily suppressed these outbursts without undue expenditure of the supply which, as was soon recognised, it was vitally important to conserve.

The right flank was thus securely held against two successive attempts. Meanwhile along the front, looking out on Rencourt and the more distant snowfield towards Cagnicourt, the surviving officers supervised the cutting of firesteps in the rear walls, covering the process by placing a number of men and several Lewis guns well out in front of the position in shell-holes.<sup>51</sup> Only half of the 4th Machine Gun Company (Vickers)—four of whose guns followed each battalion with the special duty of protecting the right flank beyond the Hindenburg Line—reached the captured position, these troops suffering very severe loss in No-Man's Land; several of the guns were at once set up in advance of O.G.2,<sup>52</sup> others in that line, and a few in O.G.1. Of the Stokes mortars, which had suffered so heavily at the outset, only two appear to have got through, and these were taken to the left.<sup>53</sup> A party of signallers of the 16th under Lance-Corporal Richards<sup>54</sup> had managed to follow the advance, laying a telephone wire, and at 5.16 a message was sent through, reporting the first objective taken. The wire was immediately cut, and was thenceforth useless. Murray soon afterwards sent three separate runners with a message that both objectives had been taken, and all units were "in."<sup>55</sup>

The narrative must now turn to the attack by the 12th Brigade along the rise west of the depression. It will be

**The** remembered that the advance of this brigade  
**12th Brigade's** was not to proceed beyond the Hindenburg  
**attack** Line, and it was consequently attacking with

<sup>51</sup> The trench was very deep and was difficult to defend until the firestep was made. The covering line was, in one part, under Sergeant J. C. C. Whitbread (of Annandale, N.S.W.), 13th Battalion.

<sup>52</sup> Lewis guns had already been posted on the right flank by Sergeant C. H. Turner (of South Greenbushes, W. Aust.), 16th Battalion. He had been specially charged by Major Black with that duty, and was badly wounded in carrying it out.

<sup>53</sup> Another precious commodity which somehow reached O.G.2 was a very small quantity of rum. It was apportioned by C.S.M. A. R. Compton (of Leichhardt, N.S.W.), 13th Battalion, to those who, he thought, deserved it.

<sup>54</sup> L/Cpl. G. Richards, M.M. (No. 136, 16th Bn.). Mechanic; of Subiaco, W. Aust., b. Honiton, Devon, Eng., 1889.

<sup>55</sup> The message arrived at 6.34.

only two battalions, the 46th (Victoria) to seize O.G.1, and the 48th (S. and W. Australia) to take O.G.2. When this was done the 46th would follow the two flanking tanks into Bullecourt (which two other tanks would at the same time encircle), while the 47th Battalion (Queensland, Tasmania, etc.) stood ready to take up, if necessary, the 46th's place in O.G.1. The brigade's machine-guns and trench-mortars were not to accompany the first attack, but several of each were to be held in readiness to come up later, if required. This brigade, during its advance of from 700 to 1,000 yards, would have the Bullecourt salient only 300 yards from its left, a danger which had been pointed out to the army commander; but it would be protected slightly by the slope of the ground, and to a greater extent by the bombardment which was to muffle this village until 5 o'clock. By that hour, it was expected, the Hindenburg Line would be gained, and accordingly the bombardment would then cease, so as to allow the tanks and the 46th to enter Bullecourt.

By the hour when the infantry was to start, however, only one tank was in front of the 46th, whose officers and men had been in their "jumping-off" trench since 3.30. This battalion was the least happy in the attacking force in that its commander, despite long experience and militia training and fine qualities of brain and character, was not apt in handling men. It also happened that by a deplorable and fatal mistake, apparently due to some ambiguity in the directions given at brigade headquarters,<sup>66</sup> the orders issued by him for the attack did not follow the final instructions from the higher staffs by which the infantry was to advance at 4.45, irrespective of whether or not the tanks had reached the Hindenburg Line. Lieutenant-Colonel Denham's<sup>67</sup> order ran:

The infantry will not advance until fifteen minutes after the tanks pass the jumping-off trench, and will move right forward into their objective following behind the tanks.

In the confusion of instructions and counter-instructions due to the necessarily hurried transmission of Gough's new plan, the error was not detected by the brigade staff, or it was

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<sup>66</sup> At the 12th Brigade's conference possible failure of the tanks was considered, but was regarded as improbable, a tank officer having informed General Robertson that only a direct hit by a heavy shell would be likely to stop a tank.

<sup>67</sup> Lieut.-Col. H. K. Denham, D.S.O., V.D. Commanded 46th Bn., 1916/17, Medical practitioner; of Sydney, b. Sydney, 14 Feb., 1883.

assumed that the first order would, as in other battalions, be verbally modified. Pressed by a company commander as to how they should act if none of the tanks arrived, Denham had answered that in such a case the infantry must go forward without them; but nothing was said as to the hour. Consequently at 4.45 the companies of the 46th, which for an hour had been in their "jumping-off" trench listening to the racket of the tanks' engines gradually approaching from the rear, continued to wait for them as directed.

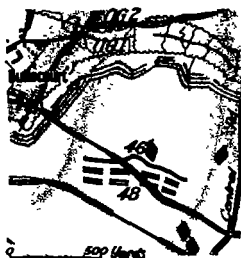
Thus, when the German barrage fell, soon after the advance of the 4th Brigade's tanks, the 12th Brigade remained lying beneath it, and stayed there long after the 4th Brigade had gone. The 46th, in front, had its three leading companies sheltered in its jumping-off trench, and the fourth, which formed a supporting wave, in the sunken road,<sup>58</sup> but behind it the 48th lay in the open on lines taped across the snow. German shells burst constantly about it and splashed their black soot across the white mantle. At this stage a tank was observed heading to pass the right of the line. On passing the flank it turned so as to move along close in front of the trench, and then, to the amazement of the nearest troops of the 46th, opened machine-gun fire on their trench. A chorus of shouts went up from the Victorians. The fire ceased, and the tank stopped; at one of its openings appeared the head of an officer who asked what troops these were. On learning that they were friends, he came out of the tank, apologised for having fired on them, and, after inquiring as to the direction of the German line, re-entered the tank, which then made off in the dark towards the distant enemy, appearing, however, to swerve too much into the depression on the right. A few minutes later one of its crew came back with news that it had been hit by a shell and that he believed himself to be the only survivor.

The light was still only sufficient to show objects fifty yards away when at 5 o'clock another tank came up, this time at the centre of the 46th's line. It crossed the jumping-off trench and then apparently broke down. Much more serious was the fact that at 5 o'clock the bombardment of Bullecourt ceased,

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<sup>58</sup> Of the fourth company, however, half had been attached to the left company, and the Lewis gun sections distributed, leaving few to act as a carrying wave.

and from now onwards the Germans there were free to observe and fire with complete impunity. Flares had already been rising from that village, and rifles and machine-guns now opened from it. With day just breaking, delay must be disastrous to the attack and accordingly, at 5.10, Captain Davis,<sup>59</sup> commanding the centre company of the 46th, telephoned to Colonel Denham: "Only one tank has passed over our jumping-off trench, and we can't see any of the others. Are we to advance?" Denham at once ordered him to move. Ten minutes earlier Colonel Leane of the 48th, anxious at receiving no word of the start, had telegraphed to his company commanders: "You do not wait for signal from tanks. When the first objective is taken, you go on and take the second." A few minutes later he asked brigade headquarters, as the attack was late, to have the barrage on Bullecourt continued; but the possibility that the tanks might be entering the village made this course impossible.



Thus, dependence on the tanks had first fatally delayed the start, and then prevented the protection of the naked flank. It was not until 5.15, when the first streaks of dawn were showing in the sky, that the 12th Brigade advanced, moving at a quick pace, "almost a run." During the whole advance men were falling through fire from Bullecourt,<sup>60</sup> but, as in the 4th Brigade, it was on reaching the wire that the heaviest loss occurred. In their haste and eagerness, the men on the extreme right had veered too far into the central depression across which the German entanglement lay completely undamaged. Slightly to the left front, however, was a "live" tank which had reached the third belt of wire about 200 yards west of the Central Road, and into its broad track through the entanglement the Victorians headed. As they moved up it, German machine-guns, suddenly turned on, mowed the party down. The tank was still firing, but when Lieutenant

<sup>59</sup> Capt. H. S. Davis, 46th Bn. Woolclasser and engineering student; of Drysdale, Vic.; b. Drysdale, 25 May, 1889. Killed in action, 11 April, 1917.

<sup>60</sup> For an account of this fire, see the narrative of the German regiment which was firing, quoted on p. 348.



Pentland,<sup>61</sup> struggling through broken wire more to the left, shouted for all unwounded infantrymen to follow him, the only ones who answered or who could be seen alive were Lance-Corporal Tobin,<sup>62</sup> badly wounded, and one private. Pentland, with the unwounded man, succeeded in returning to battalion headquarters, apparently the sole survivors of the right of the 46th. The centre and left, however, passed, as the 4th Brigade had done, through half-broken wire.<sup>63</sup> By the time they reached the trench, most of its garrison had run back to O.G.2. Few Germans were killed in O.G.1, and a dugout on the right was easily seized; but on the flanks the enemy was thicker, and counter-attacked immediately. A sharp bombing struggle was raging when the first waves of the 48th arrived.

The 48th, a chiefly Western Australian unit, "daughter" of the original 16th, had been camped for its six weeks training near corps headquarters, and one experienced spectator there, after watching it march through Hénencourt, had been moved to write to Colonel Leane his opinion of its appearance—that of the finest battalion of infantry he had seen. Its commander, since the Gaba Tepe raid the foremost fighting leader in the A.I.F., knew how to pick his officers. Among them had been three splendid members of his own family. One, perhaps the most widely loved of the brothers, B. B. Leane, had been killed on the railway embankment on April 10th; but two—Captain A. E. Leane,<sup>64</sup> nephew, a company commander, and Captain Fairley,<sup>65</sup> a connection, were with the battalion in this attack.<sup>66</sup> Seeing that when specially dangerous work was in hand, one of these relatives

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<sup>61</sup> Lieut. W. C. Pentland, 46th Bn. Coachbuilder; of Elsternwick, Vic.; b. Port Melbourne, 4 Nov., 1878.

<sup>62</sup> L/Cpl. F. E. Tobin (No. 1891; 46th Bn.). Clerk; of Albert Park, Vic.; b. Melbourne, 1880. Killed in action, 11 April, 1917.

<sup>63</sup> Captain H. S. Davis of the 46th, and Captain A. G. Moyes and Lieutenant W. Caldwell of the 48th, were among the officers hit before reaching O.G.1. Lance-Corporal A. R. Williams of the 46th, who carried a flare pistol, was badly wounded in the arm before the wire; but he bandaged his wound and carried the pistol on to the trench, where it might be urgently needed. (Davis belonged to Drysdale, Vic.; Moyes to North Adelaide and Sydney; Caldwell to Fremantle, W. Aust.; Williams to Carlton, Vic.)

<sup>64</sup> Capt. A. E. Leane, 48th Bn. Insurance inspector; of Sydney and Adelaide; b. East Adelaide, 10 May, 1894. Died of wounds while prisoner of war, 2 May, 1917.

<sup>65</sup> Lieut.-Col. T. C. Fairley, M.C.; 48th Bn. Electrical engineer, of Kalgoorlie, W. Aust.; b. Northcote, Vic., 3 Aug., 1894.

<sup>66</sup> The *soubriquet* of the 48th was the "Joan of Arc Battalion" (Made of All-Leanes).

was always (in the soldiers' slang) "for it," no jealousy was aroused, nor was there room for it. During its rest the 48th had trained hard in the mornings, and played organised games in the afternoon; "Colonel Leane's afternoon sports did it, so we all said," was the explanation given by an N.C.O. of the battalion's steadiness under the shelling that preceded this advance.

Under those shells and amid scattered bullets the battalion had lain without movement or sign of strain. Rising, it quickly overtook a tank which, after stopping to fire near the jumping off position, had moved on again. Captain Mott<sup>67</sup> and his company on the left were abreast of one when it was put out of action by shells. "Captain Mott laughed," says an orderly, "and carried on through the machine-gun fire."

On reaching O.G.1 the 48th found itself mixed with the 46th, and, on the flanks, temporarily involved in the fighting in that trench. As in the 4th Brigade, however, after a swift reorganisation, the company commanders led their men on towards O.G.2, but, here also, they faced intense fire and found the narrow entanglement almost completely uncut.

We were being raked by machine-gun fire (said a Lewis gunner, Private Rose,<sup>68</sup> afterwards) and shelled with shrapnel. Wounded and dead men were hanging in the wires all around me, and I noticed that the shell-holes were full of wounded.

Captain Mott, going back to O.G.1 for more men, was badly wounded through the neck. Lieutenant Morris,<sup>69</sup> his junior, went on with fifty men, but only ten (according to his estimate) reached O.G.2, and he himself was twice hit.<sup>70</sup> Some of the German machine-gunners continued to fire until the 48th were in the trench beside them, but on the right the enemy ran. A large part of the 48th reached O.G.2 here, and seized it. According to a message sent at the time by Lieutenant Master<sup>71</sup> of the 46th, this had occurred by 5.56.

<sup>67</sup> Lieut.-Col J E Mott, M.C.; 48th Bn. Mining engineer; of Apollo Bay, Vic.; b. Byaduk, Vic., 27 Nov., 1876, died 27 July, 1933.

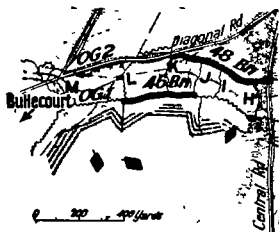
<sup>68</sup> Pte. J A. Rose (No. 2481; 48th Bn.). Farm hand; of Pinery, S Aust.; b. Adelaide, 28 July, 1897.

<sup>69</sup> Capt. R. Morris, 48th Bn. Accountant; of Perth, W. Aust.; b Sydney, 18 June, 1889.

<sup>70</sup> The 48th apparently lost about half its strength in reaching O.G.2.

<sup>71</sup> Major W. F. H. Master, M.C.; 46th Bn Farmer, of Melbourne and Lake Boga, Vic; b. London, 8 Dec., 1895

An effort was at once made to clear the flanks. Captain Moyes,<sup>72</sup> having been hit in No-Man's Land, A. E. Leane, the only company commander in the 48th left, told Lieutenant Jones<sup>73</sup> to organise a party and bomb towards the 4th Brigade, while Lieutenant Dennis<sup>74</sup> attacked on the left. For about an hour the 48th in O.G.2 was fighting strongly at close range.<sup>75</sup> At the end of that time it had extended its flank right to the Central Road, on whose bank it established a post. This was half-way to the 4th Brigade's objective, but, as has been seen, the 4th Brigade had been unable to reach the left of that objective in O.G.2, despite the leaders that had thrown themselves away in the attempt.



The 48th's left was less successful than its right. Here a sunken road—one of six that radiated like star-beams from a road-junction near Riencourt—passed diagonally through O.G.2, which was broken by it but continued for some distance along its farther bank and then recrossed it again. The break made by this road (which in this narrative will be referred to as the "Diagonal Road") was fatal to the westward progress of the 48th, which, notwithstanding continuous efforts, could not dislodge the enemy from the road-cutting close beyond its left or seize the continuation of the trench on the farther side. The break, however, in some degree hampered the Germans also; for, although they could accumulate beneath the road bank and shoot any Australian who tried to fire into the road, they must expose themselves to climb back into the 48th's position, which was thus difficult to attack. Although the 48th could not fire into the road on its left, Lewis guns were so placed as to sweep it on the right as far as the outskirts of Riencourt. Other Lewis gunners, posted in shell-holes in advance of O.G.2, fired on those Germans who

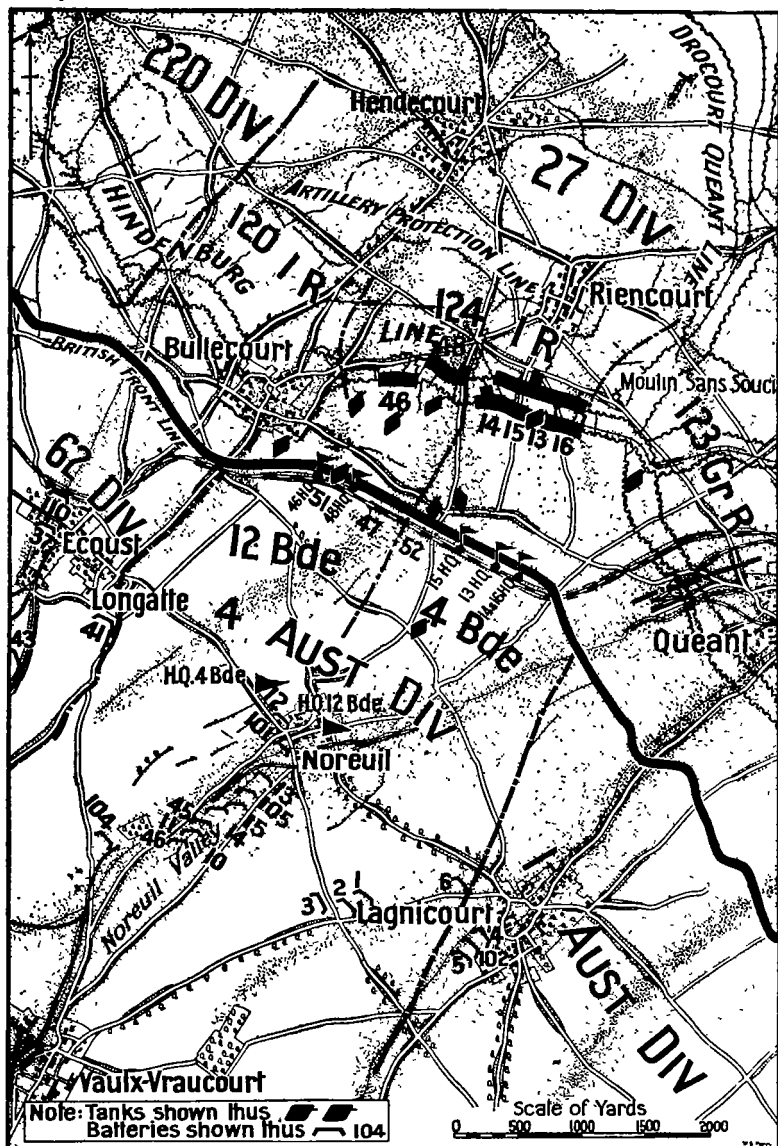
<sup>72</sup> Major A. G. Moyes, M.C.; 48th Bn. Medical student; of North Adelaide and Sydney, b. Gladstone, S. Aust., 2 Jan., 1893.

<sup>73</sup> Lieut S. E. Jones, 48th Bn. Police constable; of Adelaide; b Dinapore, India, 28 Jan., 1892. Killed in action, 11 April, 1917.

<sup>74</sup> Lieut E. J. Dennis, M.C., M.M.; 48th Bn. Carpenter; of Ridleyton, S. Aust.; b. Port Broughton, S. Aust., 1894.

<sup>75</sup> For example, as the right party bombed along the trench, a German seized the bayonet of the leading Australian and endeavoured to wrench it from him, only to be shot by the officer following behind.

Map No. 2



THE BATTLEFIELD OF BULLECOURT, SHOWING THE SITUATION AT ABOUT 9.30 A.M. ON 11TH APRIL, 1917, AFTER THE CAPTURE OF PORTION OF THE HINDENBURG LINE BY THE 4TH AUSTRALIAN DIVISION

The tanks are shown in the positions in which they were put out of action.

had retired across the snow to a sugar factory and some out-buildings 600 yards distant, and to the German "artillery protection line" half-a-mile farther, in the direction of Hendecourt. Others again enfiladed O.G.2 on the left of the 4th Brigade.

By a curious chance, while the 48th in O.G.2 was obstinately held on its left, but managed to extend its right, the case of the 46th, behind it in O.G.1, was precisely the reverse. The right of the 46th had never reached the trench, and all that could be done by the officers and men at hand was to barricade that flank near the centre of the objective, and hold on. But while the commander of the right company, Major Waine,<sup>76</sup> who had reached the trench, supervised the defence of this flank and of the centre, Captain Boddington<sup>77</sup> of the left company organised and led with great success a bombing party towards Bullecourt. The heavy bombing on that flank could constantly be heard by other parts of the force, and at one time Boddington, who in attack and counter-attack is said to have himself killed eleven Germans, succeeded in approaching the north-east corner of the Bullecourt defences.

Thus by 7 o'clock the Western Australians held 500 yards of O.G.2, and the Victorians behind them, but more to the left, 500 yards of O.G.1, the two sectors overlapping for only 250 yards in the centre. In that overlap, however, was found a communication trench between their positions, giving excellent cover. The signallers of the 48th had brought forward a telephone line. It was cut before reaching the trench, but Lance-Corporal Dowd<sup>78</sup> remained in the open and discovered the fault. He was hit, but the line was repaired and communication thus established between Captain Leane in O.G.2 and battalion headquarters. The situation seemed fairly secure, the chief danger being the extreme weakness of the 46th in O.G.1. A count ordered by Major Waine soon after the trench had been taken showed only 65 officers and men present, including at least 12 wounded.

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<sup>76</sup> Major V. J. Waine, 46th Bn. Surveyor; of Sydney; b. Redfern, N.S.W., 13 June, 1882.

<sup>77</sup> Capt. F. E. Boddington, 46th Bn. Architect; of Brisbane and Mackay, Q'land, b. Maryborough, Q'land, 5 Feb., 1888. Killed in action, 11 April, 1917.

<sup>78</sup> L/Cpl E. H. Dowd (No. 1656; 48th Bn.). Railway porter, of Terowie, S Aust., b. Whyte-Yarcowie, S. Aust., 1889.

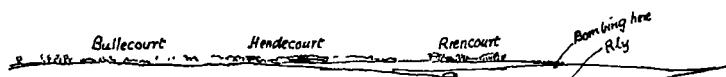
By 7 o'clock the 4th Australian Division had seized practically its whole objective in the Hindenburg Line, and the leaders on the spot, having given up the intention of continuing the thrust to Bullecourt and Riencourt, had made hurried dispositions for holding and consolidating their present position. News of the early success reached the headquarters in rear much sooner than in most heavily fought actions, the barrage flung by the German artillery, though heavy on the railway and sunken roads, being elsewhere scattered and penetrable, and the German machine-guns not being able before full daylight to prevent messengers and the wounded from making their way back to battalion headquarters at the railway. Thus, news of the capture of O.G.1 by the 4th Brigade arrived at 5.16, and the capture of O.G.2 was known at 6.4. The 12th Brigade received about 6 a message from Major Waine, that part of each of the brigade's objectives had been captured; "48th want reinforcements," he added, "also ourselves." A few minutes later a message, timed 5.56, from Lieutenant Master, stated that the Germans were counter-attacking, but the 46th was holding them. He asked for rifle-grenades and ammunition.<sup>79</sup>

As to the progress of the tanks, the staffs up to those of brigade had the information which the eyes of various spectators gave them. It was obvious that some had broken down before the start, or arrived too late, but a few had gone on before the infantry, and others followed. About 6 o'clock, with sunrise, the whole battlefield suddenly came into view of those watching from the railway banks and from observation posts scattered over the country for a mile behind them. The ground being snow-covered, and few shells falling, there was a complete absence of dust-haze. The same few minutes allowed the tank officers to see plainly for the first time all their distant objectives, and also exhibited the tanks to the German artillery observers, and during the next half-hour most of the tank crews experienced their final spasm of activity.

To Australian observers, looking over the wide expanse as the light increased, Riencourt to the right front was the first

<sup>79</sup> Shortly afterwards the news of the capture of O.G.2 in that sector was confirmed in a message, timed 6.18, from Captain Leane.

recognisable landmark; next, the trees of Hendecourt, more distant to the left front; after these one or two small dark blotches, nearer and stationary on the snow. It was not until



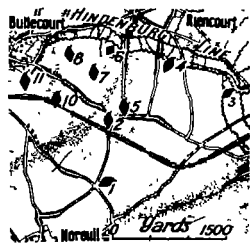
*The Bullecourt battlefield (from a sketch by the Official War Correspondent on May 3. The Hindenburg Line ran where "bombing" is noted.)*

one of these began to crawl like a slug across the surface that some observers recognised them as tanks. Whether they were beyond the Hindenburg Line or short of it, few spectators in rear could judge, since that line was only in parts observable. The moving tank, which was accompanied by a dozen infantrymen, appeared to be not far from Reincourt,<sup>80</sup> and could be seen firing towards the village with its six-pounder gun. Some time later it moved back and another was seen crawling forward. Amid the trees on the eastern edge of Reincourt a German gun flashed, and flashed again. The shell-bursts spurted from the snow close to the tank. It stopped like a frightened snail, and then began slowly to slide in another direction. Again the German gun flashed, and a shell burst near. The tank for the second time changed course, reminding onlookers of some slow helpless monster attacked without chance of escape. After a few more shots it was evidently hit, for the survivors of the crew tumbled out of it and ran to a bank some 200 yards away, where they stood for a moment in conference and then took shelter. Beside the tank there still lay several khaki figures. Two stretcher-bearers went out to them, picked up one man, and slowly carried him in.

<sup>80</sup> This tank would be either the one passed by Captain Murray, or, more probably, the tenth—commanded by Lieutenant C. E. Birkett (*see p. 315*). The official war correspondent with the A.I.F., who, like other distant observers, wrongly thought that this tank was beyond the Hindenburg Line, wrote: "It (the tank) shifts gradually up through the wire and then stands there hesitating . . . A party of a dozen infantrymen . . . started to go forward, and then hesitated as if uncertain about its direction, and then came back towards this point. One or two of them go back to meet the tank and step up to the side of it, as though whispering something in its ear. Someone comes round the side of the tank—apparently someone from inside of it—joins them for a moment, and then goes back to the tank again; the infantry start to walk forward, extending as they go to intervals of a few paces, and in a most perfect line. The tank edges on again, and then—flash. . . . She has fired her gun. Flash, flash . . . it is firing obliquely across the front of the infantry as they go forward. So they must see a German machine-gun or strong-post in that dip to the left of them. The infantry go on quite confidently into the depression, and we lose sight of them. The tank moves on, too . . ." The infantry was a reinforcing party of the 46th

The story of the tanks, as far as is known in Australia, may here be shortly told. To take them from the right leftwards. Nos. 1 and 2, which were to reach O.G.1 and 2 respectively on the right flank of the 4th Brigade, assist the infantry to block the trenches, and then cruise round the Hindenburg wire "home," entirely failed. One was late for the start. The other had trouble with its clutch. Neither reached the wire, nor is there any identifiable mention of them in the records either of the attacking infantry or of the enemy who was holding this flank. Both tanks eventually retired and were disabled, one near Noreuil and the other, apparently, near the railway.<sup>81</sup> Of the next two (3 and 4)—apparently those commanded by Lieutenants Davies<sup>82</sup> and Clarkson<sup>83</sup>—one lost direction, and—unseen and unrecorded by the infantry or by the tank corps—fought far to the east the brave death-struggle whose description is deferred until the German part of the narrative is given.<sup>84</sup> The other (No. 4)—past which Murray had squeezed his way in the wire—was held up until 5.30 close to O.G.1, but then managed to cross it and move towards O.G.2, firing. On being met by direct shelling from field-guns on either side of Riencourt,<sup>85</sup> it turned and recrossed O.G.1, but was put out of action on the edge of that trench, in which the survivors of the crew took shelter. For a time the storm of shell bursting around this tank made that part of O.G.1 untenable.

The fifth tank—probably the easternmost of the three which were to move in the gap between the brigades—did not reach the



Positions of destroyed tanks on April 11. No. 9, after being hit, was brought out, but was destroyed by a shell near l'aucourt Copse in rear of Noreuil. The position of No. 2 is uncertain, that of No. 3 was unknown to the British until after the war.

<sup>81</sup> Major Watson (*A Company of Tanks*, p. 61) states that both reached the entanglement and, being met by tremendous machine-gun fire, glided along in front of it sweeping the parapet with their fire. The Germans, however, in their full narratives make no mention of this, and the Australians in a position to see are positive that nothing even distantly corresponding to it occurred. The only tanks that closely approached the 123rd I.R. were those of Lieutenants Davies and Clarkson.

<sup>82</sup> Lieut. H. P. Davies. Clerk; of Swansea, S. Wales; b. Ammanford, S. Wales. 25 Dec., 1892. Killed in action, 11 April, 1917.

<sup>83</sup> Lieut. H. Clarkson. Insurance clerk; of Bolton, Lancs., Eng.; b. Bolton. 22 May, 1892. Killed in action, 11 April, 1917.

<sup>84</sup> P. 347.

<sup>85</sup> One gun fired from the trees on each side of the village.



trench, being hit by a shell which broke its caterpillar "track." It eventually burst into flames. No. 6, Lieutenant Money's,<sup>86</sup> was the one which, in the central depression, reached the wire, but appeared to become enmeshed in the third belt. The Germans in the neighbouring strong-point bombed and fired into it as it moved backwards and forwards in the endeavour to get clear. Shortly after 6 o'clock it was hit by a shell or trench-mortar bomb and broke into flames. A number of the crew tumbled out of its door, only to lie there still, evidently killed either by enemy bullets or by burning.<sup>87</sup> No. 7, Lieutenant Beirnsstein's,<sup>88</sup> was abandoned after being twice hit when near the starting point, its driver having been decapitated, and the whole crew more or less stunned. The four tanks forming the 12th Brigade's section were all late. Nos. 8 and 9, which had reached the brigade before it started, were quickly hit by shells. No. 10 came up about 6.30 to the Headquarters of the 48th on the railway. Its officer,<sup>89</sup> upon asking Colonel Leane what he should do, was requested to move to the left flank of the 48th, and clear the Germans from the sunken road there. Leane also pointed out the position of a German machine-gun firing from Bullecourt and asked for it to be suppressed. "Easily done!" said the tank officer, and moved forward, but, after going 400 yards towards the machine-gun, firing its six-pounders and effectively suppressing the machine-gunners, the tank returned and was hit as it regained the railway. It was not yet out of action, and, as its position brought a storm of fire upon that important centre,<sup>90</sup> Leane endeavoured to secure its removal; but its officer had been wounded, the crew would not make the attempt, and the tank continued to be shelled and half-an-hour later burst into flames, a landmark for miles around.

The eleventh, Lieutenant Skinner's,<sup>91</sup> had at first been ditched, but about 9 o'clock, after being towed over the

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<sup>86</sup> Lieut. E. W. Money. Of Elm Croft, Buckhurst Hill, Essex, Eng. Killed in action, 11 April, 1917.

<sup>87</sup> According to Major Watson, a sergeant and two men escaped.

<sup>88</sup> Now Capt. A. E. Burnett. Of Goldsithney, Marazion, Cornwall, Eng.

<sup>89</sup> Probably Lieut. C. E. Birkett (of Bassaleg, Mon., Eng.).

<sup>90</sup> See Vol. XII, plate 318. Leane's headquarters was a wretched niche in a four-foot bank. Here his signalling officer (Captain Fairley) was shot through the eye, a *liaison* officer and two men wounded, and the clothes on Leane's own back ripped by a shell.

<sup>91</sup> Capt. H. Skinner, M.C.; Royal Tank Corps Bank clerk; of Edinburgh, Scotland; b. Edinburgh, 17 Jan., 1893.

embankment by a tank that had returned from the right, came up to some guns of the 12th Machine Gun Company on the railway line on the extreme left. These Australians pointed out to the tank commander the position of some German machine-guns in Bullecourt which had been sweeping the flank, and the tank at once headed for the village. It made its way through the wire and, according to some accounts, entered a corner of the village. The German machine-guns concentrated upon it, and some of its crew were wounded by the splinters of metal which were sent flying about its interior. Finally, when in the wire south-west of the village, the tank lurched into a very large crater from which it could not climb back. The Germans brought up a trench-mortar,<sup>92</sup> and the tank commander, being unable to find any of the Australians whom he had believed to be in Bullecourt, withdrew his crew. By some miracle they returned to the railway without another casualty. About the same time the commander of the left section of tanks, an experienced officer, Lieutenant Swears,<sup>93</sup> walked from the railway into Bullecourt to look for this tank and its crew. He never came back.<sup>94</sup> The visit of the tank was effective, the German machine-gun fire on the railway not being renewed.

So far as was known on the spot, all the tanks—with the exception of that which entered Bullecourt—had fought their short fight in the area in rear of the Australian front line before 7 o'clock; their carcasses could be seen motionless, and in most cases burning, all over the battlefield.<sup>95</sup> Of their crews—103 officers and men—52 were killed, wounded, or missing. General Brand<sup>96</sup> (4th Brigade) was at 7.21 informed by Jacka of their complete failure, but the clearest and fullest description of the situation arrived at 8.45 in the form of a message from Captain Murray sent at 7.15 by a runner<sup>97</sup> after his survey

We hold first objective and part of second. Have established block on right of both objectives. In touch with 14th on left. Expect heavy bomb fighting in evening. There are six tanks at a standstill, apparently

<sup>92</sup> This is stated by the history of the 120th I.R., which held Bullecourt.

<sup>93</sup> Lieut. H. M. Swears. University student, of Totnes, Devon, Eng.; b London, 20 Feb., 1894. Killed in action, 11 April, 1917.

<sup>94</sup> *A Company of Tanks*, p. 64.

<sup>95</sup> See Vol. XII, plate 313.

<sup>96</sup> At that hour Colonel Drake Brockman (16th) rang him up and gave him a report from Captain Jacka, who was observing.

<sup>97</sup> Three runners were sent at 60 yards' interval, and all three came through.

damaged—just behind first objective there are four, and two near second.<sup>98</sup> Quite impossible to attack village. "A" Company 13th badly cut about by machine-gun fire in wire, some of all other 13th companies here O.K. We will require as many rifle and hand grenades as you can possibly send, also small arms ammunition. Most of Lewis machine-guns are O.K. Have four Vickers guns. Fear Major Black killed. Several officers killed and wounded. . . . Have plenty men. Have about 30 prisoners of 124 Regt. Will send them over at dusk. Look out for S.O.S. signals. Send white flares (as many as possible). With artillery support we can keep the position till the cows come home.

H. Murray. A Coy.<sup>99</sup>

The situation of the 12th Brigade was known by its battalion commanders at the railway line to be almost precisely the same—the tanks were finished, but the Hindenburg Line could be held if bombs and ammunition—and, in the case of the 12th Brigade, reinforcements—could be sent forward. The bomb-supply was especially urgent, for, although the 12th Brigade had taken a small supply of bombs in addition to the two carried by each rifleman,<sup>100</sup> the troops of the 4th Brigade had been equipped for open fighting beyond the Hindenburg Line in accordance with Gough's plan, and about a third of the supply had disappeared with the casualties at the first wire.

The obvious course, when the position thus became known to headquarters, would be to lay down the barrage already arranged for against the event which had happened—failure to advance beyond the Hindenburg Line. A curtain of shell-fire placed in front and on the flanks of the captured position, and on Bullecourt, Riencourt, and Hendecourt, would keep down

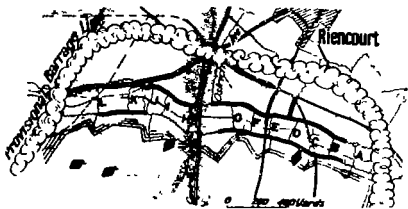
**Conflict  
of reports**

<sup>98</sup> Actually only one was near O G 2 in this sector

<sup>99</sup> To this message Lieutenant Aarons of the 16th, in charge of part of that battalion in O.G.1, whom Murray asked to forward the message, appended a similar request for ammunition and supplies, and added: "We are being shelled on both objectives by 4.5 and 5.9's. Shells well ranged coming from S.E. direction (that of Queant) . . . Cannot estimate numbers of our casualties. They are heavy—should think half of those who started off." This estimate was probably correct. Aarons also reported "Only officers (of 16th) left that I can see are Hummerston, Somerville, Kerr, McLean (slightly wounded), Burrows, and myself. May be a few others, but have not seen them. Major Black, I think, is gone, certainly wounded. . . . Captain Murray wishes to add the following (officers of 13th) are O.K.—Fletcher, Gardiner, Cooney, Morgan, Smith, Rose, Stones.—D. Aarons. D Coy 15th

<sup>100</sup> Colonel Leane of the 48th had ordered that each rifleman in his battalion should carry four bombs

the enemy there, hamper his arrangements for counter-attack, and give carrying parties a chance of making their journey. As early as 7.20 Captain Murray, seeing German troops in motion at Riencourt, fired the S.O.S. signal<sup>101</sup> for bringing down that barrage, and in that sector alone the signal was repeated seventeen times during the morning. But no answering barrage fell.



*The barrage provisionally planned.*

The reason was that the news reaching all headquarters, from that of division upwards, was diametrically opposed to that now arriving at the railway from the infantry. Early messages from the infantry had indeed stated that both objectives had been gained and the troops were pushing on to Riencourt;<sup>102</sup> and at 6.30 Corporal Wilkinson<sup>103</sup> of the 46th brought to headquarters of that battalion a verbal report from Captain Boddington that he "had reached the south-west corner of Bullecourt." Some hours later it became evident that this must be a mistake for "north-west," but at the time both this statement and that concerning Riencourt were supported by messages from Australian artillery officers observing for their batteries. The light, that morning, was peculiar. The official war correspondent with the A.I.F., who watched the battle, wrote that in the "faint moonlight and growing dawn" all objects on the thin white mantle of snow

stood straight out so black that it was difficult as the light grew to tell the difference between the grey (German) uniforms and those of the Australians at any great distance.

This fact, and the difficulty of judging the distance with the snow screening the slopes and landmarks, probably account for the unusual inaccuracy of reports. At 5.35 a forward observing officer reported that both Bullecourt and Riencourt

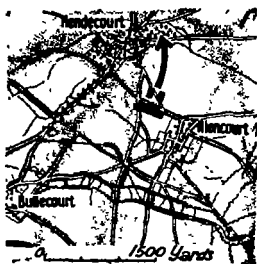
<sup>101</sup> Three successive flares—green, red, green.

<sup>102</sup> This was stated accurately enough by Lieutenant Drybrough of the 15th Battalion, who reached the embankment, wounded, before 7 a.m. A report was accordingly sent "Both objectives taken. Troops 400 yards north, still going." It was not realised that these were comparatively few and that the movement was not general.

<sup>103</sup> Cpl. J. W. Wilkinson (No. 4948; 46th Bn.). Farmer; of Gisborne, Vic.; b Green Hills, Caramut, Vic, 1 Oct., 1887. Killed in action, 3 April, 1918.

had been "captured by tanks;" at 5.39 Headquarters of the 4th Artillery Brigade notes—"our infantry seen in Bullecourt and Riencourt." At 6.20 Headquarters of the 4th Divisional Artillery noted: "F.O.O. reports Bullecourt ours, but not cleaned up. Men seen leaving Bullecourt in extended order towards Reincourt. Our infantry seen at U.22.c.5.3 (north-east of Bullecourt) at 6.30 a.m." A forward observing officer of the 62nd British Division reported seeing these troops, and "believed" them to be Australian. At 6.50 Headquarters of the 4th Division's artillery again noted: "F.O.O. reports our men seen beyond Reincourt." At 7.30 half-a-company of infantry was observed moving westward along the 12th Brigade's sector of the captured line "as if making for Bullecourt."<sup>104</sup> At 7.45 a tank was reported in the same sector moving towards Bullecourt. A little later Germans were stated to be massing north-east of Bullecourt, and at 8.15 two forward observing officers of the 1st Australian Division's artillery reported that they had seen two tanks followed by a company of Australian infantry moving down the slopes south of Hendecourt—a mile beyond the Hindenburg Line—and that after temporarily passing from sight they came into view again until hidden in the trees round Hendecourt.

The contact airmen of the 4th Squadron,<sup>105</sup> who were over the line at 6.30 calling for flares, could see in the 4th Brigade's neighbourhood none except German flares which rose densely just beyond the right flank, and in the 12th Brigade's sector a single flare on the edge of the wire on the right, evidently lit by that flank of the 46th, which failed to "get in." Airmen of another squadron, however, reported "several of our men" in the Hindenburg Line on the western edge of Bullecourt (that is, opposite the 62nd Division).



The arrow shows the reported advance by tanks and infantry.

<sup>104</sup> Undoubtedly part of the reinforcing company of the 47th (see pp 321-2).

<sup>105</sup> Lieutenants E P Charles and E W Monk. Many Australians in the heat of fighting did not observe this machine, but it was so much in evidence that some Germans afterwards believed the attack to have been an experiment in combined action by aeroplanes, tanks and infantry. A second aeroplane, at 7.30, drew intense machine-gun fire from Germans on the Quéant flank.

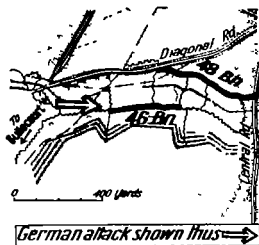
This information, coming from the normal sources of reliable news, was naturally accepted as accurate. The earliest reports from the infantry, to the effect that the 4th Brigade was attacking Riencourt and the 12th Bullecourt, were by 7 o'clock reaching General Gough, the reported movement against Bullecourt being confirmed by a message from the 62nd Division. If they were correct, the time for attempting the passage of the 4th Cavalry Division through the German line was obviously approaching. At 2 a.m. the division had marched from the old Somme battlefield to a position of readiness at Mory; and at 7.30, on receipt of news from I Anzac that Bullecourt and Riencourt were believed to have been taken, the 17th Lancers and four machine-guns were detached from its leading brigade and sent up to Ecoast. A detachment, partly of Indians but including some Royal Engineers, moved to the railway embankment in readiness to advance to the entanglement and clear a passage for cavalry.<sup>106</sup> Reports from the Hindenburg Line describing the failure of the tanks and curtailment of the attack had not yet been received.

It is needless to state that in these circumstances—with everything apparently going well, tanks and infantry moving in Bullecourt and beyond Riencourt, and cavalry preparing to follow them—the staffs of the division and corps did not dream of putting down the barrage immediately beyond the Hindenburg Line. The artillery, acting on the information of its observers, was throwing its shells beyond Riencourt, covering the reported advance of its infantry. The Quéant flank was still screened with smoke, but Bullecourt, Riencourt, Hendecourt, and the snowfield beyond the Hindenburg Line lay undisturbed by a single shell.

Meanwhile, all unconscious of the exaggerated reports of their success which were flying round the higher staffs, the two **Holding on—** brigades were consolidating their position,  
**12th Brigade** which Murray, in his survey, had found to contain none of the expected surprises—no concrete dugouts,

<sup>106</sup> The official war correspondent notes (between 6.5 and 6.20 a.m.) "There are actually three horsemen up by the wire. They have come back at high speed, so they must be under fire too." (He had noted that the Australian wounded leaving the Hindenburg Line tried to run part of the way—which indicated that they were under heavy fire.)

or labyrinth of underground passages.<sup>107</sup> The left brigade (12th) had about 7 o'clock been heavily counter-attacked in the rear line (O.G.I), held by the 46th Battalion. This line was continuous with the German front trench round Bullecourt, and the attempt was evidently being made by the Bullecourt garrison. With a trench-mortar emplaced near the north-eastern corner of the village, the Germans enfiladed the 46th's position, and they strongly attacked its left with bombs. As its right also was being bombed, the expenditure of grenades was considerable. A call now came from Captain Boddington on the left for men and bombs. There were few men to send, but the slender supply of grenades, already collected at convenient points was hurried to him. They were quickly used, and it was suddenly realised that the position was serious. The left flank was bombed back along the trench.<sup>108</sup> Colonel Denham, however, had already received word from Lieutenant Master and Major Waine that men and ammunition were needed, and at 6.10 a carrying party, thirty strong, had been sent with bombs and rifle-grenades. At 6.30 the



leading company of the 47th, under Captain North,<sup>109</sup> followed, picking up at the railway line 600 bombs in addition to the two carried by each man. At 6.40 upon another urgent call<sup>110</sup> from Major Waine, Colonel Denham sent forward with bombs all men of the 46th available at the railway, and some time later he obtained from the brigadier another party from the 47th.

Of these reinforcements, the 46th's carrying parties suffered heavy loss and only fragments got through, but most of the company of the 47th duly reached its destination. As the parties reached O.G.I, waiting men seized the bombs and ran with them to the left where the new supply immediately

<sup>107</sup> He did indeed come on one bay which appeared to finish at the shaft of a dugout. Descending this and passing through the dugout to another stairway, one came up again into a continuation of the trench, which at this point must either have been unfinished or blocked by shell-fire. Possibly some passages existed leading to the intended concrete dugouts (*see p. 345*).

<sup>108</sup> There is evidence that a fraction of the 46th may have retired about this time. If so, it may have been bombed out of the trench, or may have been previously held up short of it and have retired from there.

<sup>109</sup> Brigadier F. R. North, M.C., 47th Bn. Articled law clerk, of Indooroopilly, Q'land, b. Fairney Lawn, Ipswich, Q'land, 13 April, 1894.

<sup>110</sup> Timed 6.25. One of these parties went forward, covered by a tank which it met on the way (*see footnote on p. 313*).

turned the scale in that trench.<sup>111</sup> Part of the lost ground was regained, but Captain Boddington, while trying to see the effect of the bombs thrown, was killed, and Lieutenant Stanton, who succeeded him, found that neither bombs nor men sufficed to carry the flank farther. The 48th, which also had asked for men and ammunition, was strengthened by half the reinforcing company of the 47th, and was also reinforced by a carrying party of its own under Lieutenant Imlay,<sup>112</sup> who reached it about 7.30 without loss, bringing bombs, and ammunition for the Lewis guns. The arrival of Captain North's men enabled a new attempt to be made to drive the enemy from the sunken Diagonal Road on the left of the 48th. Lieutenant Kelly<sup>113</sup> of the 47th<sup>114</sup> was killed there. The Germans were for a time suppressed, but were always difficult to reach from the trench, which lay on the road-bank somewhat above them. In order to oust them Lance-Corporal Carr<sup>115</sup> (48th) scrambled out on to the bank and made his back the platform for a Lewis Gun fired by Sergeant Cooper.<sup>116</sup> Cooper was quickly killed, but Carr was uninjured.

The Germans on this flank, though often within thirty yards, were, shortly after 8, fought to quiescence, and except on the left of the 46th, where bombing was continuous, the position of the 12th Brigade became fairly quiet and remained so for over an hour. Two machine-guns of the 12th Company under Lieutenant Upton<sup>117</sup> were sent up and emplaced on the left of the 46th's position in O.G.1. These, as well as the Lewis guns of the 48th, found ample occupation in firing at Germans coming out of Riencourt or hurriedly digging the incomplete sections of their "artillery defence line" towards

<sup>111</sup> When Captain Leane of the 48th in O.G.2, hearing of the danger in O.G.1, sent Lieutenant S. N. McKenzie (of Marchagee, W. Aust.) to inquire, the latter was informed by an officer of the 40th that, having more bombs, the battalion could now hold. Lieutenant L. G. R. Challen (of Perth, W. Aust.), 48th Battalion, who visited the trench about the same time, observed for himself that the 40th was now secure.

<sup>112</sup> Capt N. G. Imlay, M.C., 48th Bn. Customs officer, of Samarai, Papua; b. Croydon, N.S.W., 11 Jan., 1887.

<sup>113</sup> Lieut C. B. Kelly, 47th Bn. Public servant; of Maclean, N.S.W.; b. Maclean, 4 Feb., 1894. Killed in action, 11 April, 1917.

<sup>114</sup> From 7.38 to 8 Lieutenant Dennis (48th) was still keeping up the attempt to bomb to the left.

<sup>115</sup> Lieut. W. B. Carr, M.C., D.C.M.; 48th Bn. Farmer; of Port Lincoln, S. Aust., b. Port Lincoln, 19 Aug., 1886.

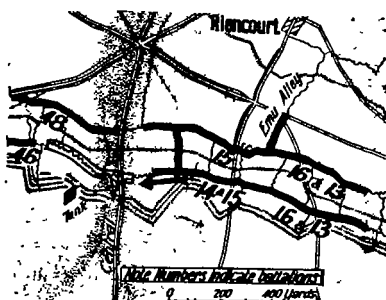
<sup>116</sup> L/Sgt. J. C. Cooper (No. 3063; 48th Bn.). Stone mason; of Leichhardt, N.S.W., b. Fitzroy, Vic., 1892. Killed in action, 11 April, 1917.

<sup>117</sup> Lieut E. P. C. Upton, 12th M.G. Coy. Clerk; of Lithgow, N.S.W.; b. Mudgee, N.S.W., 11 Sept., 1891.



Hendecourt. A count ordered by Captain Leane at 9.30 showed that there were 9 officers and 218 men of the 48th in O.G.2 holding, with perhaps 40 of the 47th, 600 yards of trench. The garrison of O.G.1, including part of the 47th and the machine-gunners, was now over 100. Many of the wounded, who had previously been collected in a bay of the trench, had been killed by a *minenwerfer* bomb falling among them during the counter-attack, and the remainder had consequently been carried into the dugout on the right. The small garrison could do no more than hold its own; progress eastwards to join the 4th Brigade was out of the question.

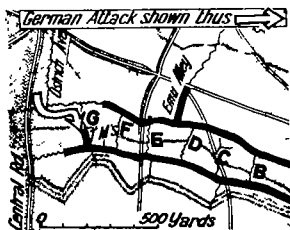
The flanks of the 4th Brigade, for an hour or more after the capture of the trenches, were engaged in beating off sharp bombing attacks by the neighbouring German posts. On the left the party under Parsonage and Emerson thrusting down O.G.1 towards the 46th Battalion 400 yards away was stubbornly opposed by the intervening Württembergers. The resistance of the Germans in that narrow sector was one of the most remarkable episodes of the day. The 48th in O.G.2 had practically cut them off from their rear. Yet, besides resisting on both their flanks, they could be seen bombing the tank which was struggling backwards and forwards in the wire on their front. The Mills bombs of Parsonage's and Emerson's party were far more effective than the Württembergers' egg-bombs, and, while they lasted, the Australians advanced about 100 yards, capturing a few of the German bombers; but the supply was soon exhausted, and when only German grenades, found in the trench, remained, a barricade was built. At the same time some of the 46th were seen apparently withdrawing, and the attempt to join hands with it for the moment ceased.<sup>118</sup>



The arrow shows Lieut. Parsonage's attack.

<sup>118</sup> If this effort had succeeded, the half-sheltered "Central Road" would have been available for communication with the railway, and the whole result might have been different.

In O.G.2 the left of the 4th Brigade had been fiercely attacked by Württembergers who, when day had only half-broken, entered it from their western communication trench (Ostrich Avenue) and with bombs drove the flank of the 14th and 15th Battalions for 150 yards along O.G.2. These Germans also advanced across the open towards O.G.1, where the flanking troops under Lieutenant Parsonage at first mistook them for Australians withdrawing and allowed them to approach. The strangers, however, began to fire, and were quickly driven back by Vickers machine-guns and Lewis guns. The two Stokes mortars under Lieutenant Sanders,<sup>119</sup> which had been emplaced in cross-trench "G," were turned upon these Germans, but the range was too short. Thereafter the extreme left of the brigade's objective in O.G.2, and Ostrich Avenue leading to it, remained in German hands; but the Australians guarded the flank, one small party under Company Sergeant-Major O'Sullivan Power<sup>120</sup> (15th) holding cross-trench "G,"<sup>121</sup> and another barricading O.G.2 a little short of its junction with this sap. The barricade was held through heavy fighting by men of the 14th and 15th led by Lieutenant Eibel<sup>122</sup> (15th). The trench-mortars were next emplaced so as to fire down O.G.1 towards the 46th, but their ammunition was soon expended.<sup>123</sup> The attempt to join hands was finally given up, and thenceforward, as grenades were short, only sufficient were thrown to keep the Germans in check.



A counter-attack was also made by the enemy on the troops holding the other long communication trench, Emu Alley, near Riencourt. The Australians were bombed out of it, but a party was quickly organised and with rifle-grenades fought its

<sup>119</sup> Capt. R. E. Sanders, 4th L.T.M. Bty Farm band; of Tallandowring, Vic.; b. New Southgate, London, Eng., 1 Sept., 1895.

<sup>120</sup> C.S.M. W. O'S. Power, M.M. (No. 1788; 15th Bn.). Clerk; of Brisbane, b. Richmond, Qland, 20 Nov., 1894.

<sup>121</sup> Power (15th) had eight men. Near by, Privates W. Leslie (of Lithgow, N.S.W.) and P. C. Dwyer (of Thirroul, N.S.W.) of the 13th sniped at a German trench-mortar battery in the central depression.

<sup>122</sup> Lieut. H. A. Eibel, 15th Bn. Farmer; of Yangan, Q'land; b. Jandowae, Q'land, 1889. Killed in action, 11 April, 1917. (Captain Dunworth, after his wounds had been temporarily dressed, returned to the left flank.)

<sup>123</sup> According to one account, they had only 20 rounds

way back and barricaded the trench, Lewis gunners and machine-gunners in O.G.2 playing on any Germans who attempted to bolt from it. There now occurred in the sector of the 4th Brigade a marked lull, in which the distant bombing on the flank of the 46th near Bullecourt was the only hard fighting that could be seen or heard. The opportunity was taken to reorganise. O.G.1, at first much cumbered by wounded,<sup>124</sup> was cleared, the serious cases being carried into dugouts where they were carefully tended by two captured German medical orderlies. Except for shortage of supplies and the weakness of the 46th (known only to itself), the whole position seemed secure, with barricades and bombing parties on the flanks, and Lewis and machine-guns so well posted along the front that organised movement over the open within 400 yards was impossible for the enemy. Even some of the sunken roads were enfiladed—a South Australian Lewis gunner of the 12th Brigade caught a body of Germans coming down the Diagonal Road from Riencourt and sent their helmets flying.

On the other hand the German machine-guns also were sweeping the open, not only in front but in rear of the Australian position, especially in the 4th

#### **Difficulties**

Brigade's sector. When Lieutenant Aarons (16th) directed the more lightly wounded to make their way back to the railway, they came under fire so severe that it was useless attempting to pass through it, and returning to the trench they were sent into the dugouts to wait for a better opportunity.<sup>125</sup> A party of thirty prisoners sent to the rear under escort was also shot down. Three successive runners of the 15th Battalion attempting to carry messages to the railway line were killed. Only at long intervals did messengers reach headquarters, now of one battalion, now of another. Early in the morning Colonel McSharry (15th), anxious for news of his troops, sent forward near the Central Road Lieutenant Rae,<sup>126</sup> but both he and an officer of the 17th Lancers who went with him were wounded by machine-gun

<sup>124</sup> They had dragged themselves thither from both the entanglements. Captain D. P. Wells of the 13th, himself badly wounded, ordered the clearance.

<sup>125</sup> The stretcher-bearers had started to work as soon as the advance began, but a number were shot down.

<sup>126</sup> Lieut. J. M. Rae, M.C., M.M.; 15th Bn. Labourer, of Cabramatta, N.S.W.; b. Sydney. 29 June, 1889.

fire, and returned with the belief that it was impossible to reach the line. McSharry next sent his intelligence officer, Lieutenant Barnes,<sup>127</sup> to attempt to reach the battalion by any route. Barnes got through to the centre of the brigade, but was mortally wounded before he could return.<sup>128</sup> In the sector of the 12th Brigade, although communication was easier,<sup>129</sup> few men carrying ammunition now reached the line. One small party of the 48th under Corporal Marshall,<sup>130</sup> heading for a sally-port on the right of the 46th, found it garrisoned by Germans who were firing at close range across the rear of the 46th's position. Marshall was mortally wounded, and the whole party shot down. The 48th Battalion's telephone line to O.G.2 was interrupted, despite the efforts of the linesmen,<sup>131</sup> and at 9.30 Colonel Leane sent forward his intelligence officer, Lieutenant Watson,<sup>132</sup> to ascertain the situation. Watson, who reached the trench and, finding the 48th short of officers, decided to stay there, reported that a battalion of German infantry was advancing from Hendecourt.<sup>133</sup> Colonel Leane at once asked for artillery fire to protect his troops.

Both brigadiers, Brand and Robertson, were now fully alive to the true position—that only the Hindenburg Line was held, and ammunition was needed, but that, as Murray had said, “with artillery support we can keep the position till the cows come home.” They now endeavoured to have a protective barrage laid 200 yards in front of their troops, and on both flanks. The artillery-group commander responsible (Lieutenant-Colonel Rabett), however, in view of the information from artillery observers that tanks and troops were

<sup>127</sup> Lieut. F. E. Barnes, M.M.; 15th Bn. Carpenter; of Brisbane; b. Nanango, Q'land, 1893. Died of wounds, 11 April, 1917.

<sup>128</sup> The only messages received by Colonel McSharry were a pigeon message sent at 7.10 by Captain Dunworth, then at the barricade on the left in O.G.2, asking for more supplies, and a verbal message from Lieutenant Eibel (at the same place) saying that he was “done for” and returning to the battalion commander his map and other papers.

<sup>129</sup> In addition to those mentioned, Lieutenant D. Menzies (of Clare district, S. Aust.), 48th Battalion, took two parties to the wire.

<sup>130</sup> Cpl. F. S. Marshall (No. 3727; 48th Bn.). Farmer; of Bordertown, S. Aust.; b. Bordertown, 10 Oct., 1889. Died of wounds while prisoner of war, 13 April, 1917.

<sup>131</sup> Especially Lance-Corporal W. Woods (of Subiaco, W. Aust.), who, though hit by two shell fragments which pierced his steel helmet, continued to mend the wire until the fighting finished.

<sup>132</sup> Lieut. W. G. Watson, M.C.; 48th Bn. Dairy produce merchant; of Fremantle, W. Aust.; b. North Fitzroy, Vic., 27 April, 1891. Died of wounds, 28 April, 1917.

<sup>133</sup> This intelligence was possibly sent by Watson before he arrived at the Hindenburg Line.

far beyond the Hindenburg Line, did not dare to give an order which—if those reports were true—would mean shattering these with his fire. After referring the report back to the observers, who confirmed it, he resolutely refused to order the barrage. To the infantry commanders, who felt certain that the report was a myth and the barrage an absolutely vital need, the refusal was exasperating in the extreme. "A most aggravating telephonic communication took place," notes the diarist of Brand's headquarters, but the artillery staff could not be shaken, and General Birdwood, on the matter being referred to him, supported its refusal.

About the same time, at 9.35, and on the strength of the same reports, General Gough ordered the 4th Cavalry Division to pass through the Hindenburg Line in the direction of Fontaine. It had already acted. At 8.50, on receipt of a message that Bullecourt and Riencourt were definitely reported to have been taken, the Sialkot Brigade had been ordered to push through and seize the high ground about Hendecourt. The dismounted wire-cutting party at the railway embankment was sent forward on foot to cut the entanglement behind the 12th Brigade; Captain Parbury's<sup>134</sup> squadron of the 17th Lancers galloped to the embankment, and the main body of the regiment with "Q" Battery, Royal Horse Artillery, followed it across the Noreuil-Longatte road. These movements arrested the attention of most observers on the battlefield, including those of the German artillery and probably others in a German aeroplane which flew over at that juncture. The enemy's guns shelled the cavalry behind the embankment, killing some horses, scattering others. The regiment massed farther back, "in a huge square," as an Australian spectator<sup>135</sup> described it, was heavily shelled by 5.9-inch howitzers, the explosions causing confusion among the horses, and at 10.30 the force was withdrawn. As for the wire cutters, they had barely reached the entanglement before machine-guns were turned upon them, several being killed and the officer and a number of others wounded.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Major H. F. Parbury, M.C.; 17th Lancers. Of London; b. 30 April, 1886.

<sup>135</sup> Private T. F. Arnold. The cavalry was in close formation.

<sup>136</sup> The 17th Lancers had one man killed and 15 wounded, the wire-cutting party lost about 20, including a number of Indians. These apparently are the "coloured troops" referred to in German accounts of the battle—no others were present.

The same untrue reports caused the commander of the V Corps at 8.10 to order action by the 62nd Division. In accordance with plan, patrols of the right brigade (185th) of this division had since 7 o'clock been out watching for the approach of the four tanks from the left of the Australian attack, since the arrival of these tanks in Bullecourt (followed by a battalion of Australian infantry) was to be the signal for the British infantry to advance.<sup>137</sup> A British artillery observer at 6.30<sup>138</sup> thought—perhaps correctly—that he saw Australian troops on the north-eastern outskirts of Bullecourt. The 12th Australian Brigade believed that its troops were in the village, and at 8.10 a statement to this effect from I Anzac must have reached V Corps, which informed the division:

Anzacs report no opposition in Bullecourt.

There is no doubt that the wish—whether expressed or not—behind the Anzac message was that the 62nd Division should attack, since Birdwood was most anxious for support on that flank. On the strength of this message, the V Corps now ordered the 62nd not to await the appearance of the tanks, of which there was still no sign.<sup>139</sup> The commander of the 62nd Division<sup>140</sup> accordingly ordered his patrols to push into Bullecourt, followed by a battalion.

The news concerning Bullecourt, however, was conflicting and puzzling. The 12th Australian Brigade complained of fire from that direction and wanted the village shelled, and at 10.15 the 4th Australian Division informed the 62nd that "it was not at all certain" that the Australians held the place. The patrols of the 62nd Division eventually reported that they had found only one narrow lane in the Bullecourt wire, and were uncertain whether this lane penetrated right through the entanglement. Long before this news had arrived, the battle had ended without further action by the 62nd Division.

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<sup>137</sup> The Australian battalion (the 46th) was to fire three green flares on reaching Bullecourt, as a signal to the 62nd Division.

<sup>138</sup> This was precisely the time when the verbal message from Captain Boddington was received (*see p. 318*).

<sup>139</sup> At this juncture, indeed (8.10 a.m.), word arrived from the 4th Australian Division that the tanks for the 62nd Division were apparently derelict, but that Bullecourt was "fairly quiet." General Holmes had heard the report that two tanks followed by infantry had gone to Hendecourt, and he referred to it in this message.

<sup>140</sup> Major-General W. P. Braithwaite, the same who had been Hamilton's chief-of-staff in Gallipoli.



21. BULLECOURT, FROM THE GERMAN LINES

A German photograph taken, apparently early in April 1917, from the front trench of the Hindenburg Line, inside which the village lay.

*By courtesy of the Reichsarchiv  
Aust War Memorial Collection No. H12360*



22. BULLECOURT, FROM THE AUSTRALIAN LINES AT NORFOLK

Photographed on 23rd April, 1917, from a sunken road held by the 7th Infantry Brigade.

*Aust War Memorial Official Photo No E605*

*To face p 329.*



Meanwhile, Australian battalion commanders at the railway, and the two brigade headquarters in Noreuil, realised that the position of their troops in the Hindenburg Line must be one of great difficulty. Shortly before 10 there arrived a pigeon message sent at 7.10 by Captain Dunworth (15th) asking for bombs, rifle-grenades, and ammunition. But since two carrying parties had been shattered, Colonel McSharry recognised that the attempt was impossible before dusk. In the other brigade a message was received at 10 from Major Waine (46th):

Must have more ammunition. Vickers (machine-gun) requires four gallons water and at least 6,000 rounds S.A.A. Enemy massing Riencourt. Rifle grenades most important.

Colonel Denham at once sent four petrol tins of water for the guns, employing as carriers the last men whom he had. Colonel Leane (48th) had endeavoured to send up two trench-mortars, but these were not to be found at the rendezvous arranged with him by the brigade staff, and remained, therefore, unavailable. From 9 o'clock onwards some of the observers in rear as well as in the line had seen German reinforcements moving to Riencourt and Hendecourt<sup>141</sup> and thence moving in open order, or by twos and threes, into the sunken roads beyond the captured position. The heavy artillery, it is true, reported them as Australians retiring from those villages. The commander of the 101st Howitzer Battery,<sup>142</sup> however, immediately laid the fire of his howitzers between these Germans and the captured position, and kept it there in defiance of the opinion of his group-commander. By 11 o'clock the truth had been grasped as far back as 4th Divisional Headquarters, and General Holmes telegraphed to corps headquarters:

Situation appears to be that we are in Hindenburg Line within our proper limits, but no more. Not in Bullecourt or Riencourt. . . . Apparently no tank actually reached Hindenburg Line.

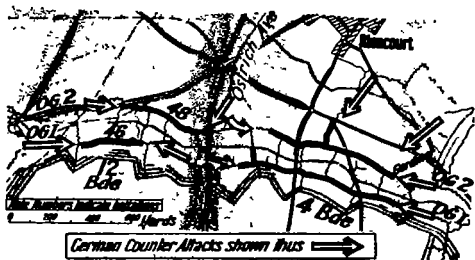
The divisional staff now set itself to secure three urgent measures—the reinforcing of the troops, the laying down of a protective barrage, and the bombardment of Bullecourt.

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<sup>141</sup> Motor lorries were reported entering Hendecourt, and a battalion marching to Riencourt from the direction of Quéant

<sup>142</sup> Major J. C. Selmes (of Sydney)

But by that time the problem had moved swiftly to another solution. The troops in the Hindenburg Line had at first fired on the enemy reinforcements, but eventually, through shortage of ammunition, their officers stopped them from shooting at any Germans except at close range. About 10 o'clock<sup>143</sup> the enemy began a heavy counter-attack from all directions against the captured position—up both trenches against both flanks of both brigades; and, from the front, both over the open and down Emu Alley. The frontal attempt was, indeed, hardly observable to the Australians, the enemy being unable to cross the open any more freely than themselves, and only trickling forward in twos and threes. But down the westerly communication trench (Ostrich Avenue), he thrust reinforcements into the gap between the two brigades. The attack was preceded by a bombardment especially severe in the trenches of the 12th Brigade, where, from about 9 o'clock, the trench-mortar north-east of Bullecourt vigorously enfiladed the rear trench, bursting its bombs among the 46th, while a field battery, also north of Bullecourt, swept the parapet of the 48th.



It was probably on the 46th that the attack first fell, but the right of the other brigade almost at once became involved in what Captain Murray afterwards described as "a bomb fight of the first order." In support of Captain Gardiner's bombers there were sitting, behind the next traverse, men ready to take the throwers' places as they became exhausted. The grenades carried by the garrison had already been collected and "dumped" near the flanks, and Murray and other officers now ordered a search for all bombs that remained on the wounded or the accessible dead. So long as these held out, the German attack made no headway.

<sup>143</sup> German records show that the counter-attack was ordered to begin at 9 a.m.

Not long after the din had begun, however, the troops holding the front line of the 4th Brigade could tell from the messages passed along that the men bombing on the right were running short of grenades. The frontal posts had already been required to transmit their bombs to the flanks, and now the men on the left in O.G.2, against whom the attack did not at first develop heavily, were ordered to send theirs. In spite of this, on the right of O.G.2 the supply soon became so short that Gardiner's men could only reply with an occasional bomb to continuous missiles of the Germans. Above the trench it was almost impossible to lift a hand, the enemy machine-guns from three sides sweeping the parapet with a hurricane of fire. A fixed machine-gun in the Hindenburg Line farther west was particularly effective, but a great part of the fire came from the houses of Riencourt, in whose windows the Germans could be seen crowded. A few dozen shells could have brought the walls down upon them—as Murray afterwards said, "It was crying for guns, but there were none on them." In spite of repeated S.O.S. signals, the shells continued to burst only on the distant horizon. The Lewis gunners, however, were still able to prevent the Germans from using the open, and the fighting was thus entirely confined to the trenches.

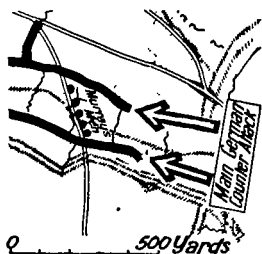
It was now evident that, without more bombs, the Australians could hardly hope to hold out until dusk. Captain Gardiner, the senior forward officer of the 13th, after a hurried conference with Captains Murray (13th), Somerville, and Hummerston (16th), and Lieutenants Aarons and Kerr<sup>144</sup> (16th), decided that, if necessary, the brigade should fall back into shell-holes just out of bomb range and endeavour to dig in there under cover of its artillery.<sup>145</sup> Signalling by flags being prevented by the hurricane of machine-gun fire, and messages by power-buzzer having been jammed by the enemy, Lieutenant Aarons volunteered to carry a message warning headquarters of this decision, and asking for the barrage. Rushing from shell-hole to shell-hole, and later crawling beside the nine-inch bank of a road towards Noreuil, Aarons and a companion<sup>146</sup> started off.

<sup>144</sup> Capt. J. S. Kerr, M.C.; 16th Bn. Mechanical engineer; of Wellington Mills W. Aust.; b. Moonee Ponds, Vic., 26 July, 1892.

<sup>145</sup> It was Captain Gardiner's first fight in France. Murray, whose experience was greater, entertained no hope of this brave decision being carried into effect.

<sup>146</sup> Cpl. (later Sgt.) R. E. Sullivan, M.M. (No. 784; 13th Bn.). Labourer, of Nagambie, Vic.; b. Tabilk, Vic., 1895.

It was then 10.20. The struggle on the right of O.G.2 quickly became desperate. A Lewis gun under Lance-Corporal Barker<sup>147</sup> (16th), so far successful in keeping the enemy down, had to stop for its drums to be refilled with cartridges. When next it opened, Germans were within forty yards, and a bullet smashed the gun and another the jaw of the gunner.<sup>148</sup> In vain Murray stationed men with rifles along a bank<sup>149</sup> across the open close behind the right-flank posts. The superiority of the enemy's bomb-supply was overwhelming. The Australians, with the bombs flying over and bursting behind them, were steadily cleared by the Germans from one bay after another: some from O.G.1 leapt out into craters near by, others herded along the bays. German bombs presently falling among them again after each withdrawal. Murray, in O.G.2, saw a white signal flag raised a bay or two back, evidently by men at the tail of the retreat. "Shoot that flag down!" he ordered, and the men with him brought it down in three shots. As a desperate venture he organised an attempt to charge over the open and shoot down the German bombers; but the men who climbed out to make the rush were immediately shot. From parts of the 4th Brigade's trenches it could be seen that the same thing was happening to the 12th Brigade, part of which now began to withdraw.



At this stage it became evident that, if the troops were to avoid destruction or capture, only one course remained—to order the withdrawal as foreshadowed in the message carried by Aarons. Accordingly, after Lieutenant Dodd<sup>150</sup> of the machine-guns, had been warned to destroy his guns—a task which he at once commenced—Murray passed along the line a message to the troops to withdraw.<sup>151</sup> To give time for them

<sup>147</sup> Cpl. W. Barker, M.M. (No. 750; 16th Bn.). Labourer; of Midland Junction, W. Aust.; b Midland Junction, 1 Oct., 1896.

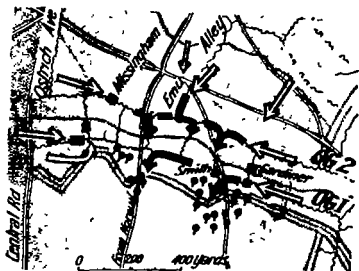
<sup>148</sup> Pte. J. J. T. H. Osmond (No. 2302; 16th Bn.). Labourer; of Mount Magnet, W. Aust.; b Cairns, Q'land, 1890.

<sup>149</sup> That of a road which diagonally crossed O.G.1 and 2.

<sup>150</sup> Lieut. G. C. Dodd, 4th M.G. Coy. Locomotive fireman; of Cairns, Q'land; b Cooktown, Q'land, 21 Aug., 1894.

<sup>151</sup> Some men had first been sent out to see if a line of shell-holes suitable for occupation existed, but only two returned.

to get clear, Captain Gardiner ordered the officers on the flanks to hold back the enemy to the last. Going to O.G.1, he stationed Lieutenant Smith<sup>152</sup> at the nearest exit—a German sally-port near cross-trench "C"—with orders to turn the troops through it and so out of the trenches. Then, with Lieutenants Cooney<sup>153</sup> (13th) and Culverwell<sup>154</sup> (16th), and one other, he took position in cross-trench "B," from which they could bomb the advancing Germans. They had forty bombs which they began to throw slowly. In O.G.1 Lieutenant Stones (13th)<sup>155</sup> with Private Leon Jean Briand<sup>156</sup> and one or two others, having received from Lieutenant Ingram (15th) two boxes of German bombs, made a similar stand. Gardiner had taken his message to the left flank



in O.G.2, now being strongly attacked, and it also reached the men holding Emu Alley leading towards Riencourt. The post in this trench<sup>157</sup> was duly withdrawn by its commander, Sergeant Cross<sup>158</sup> (13th), but Corporal Wheeler,<sup>159</sup> in charge of a small party out in advance of the centre, being uncertain as to the source of the order and in no position to clear his doubts, told his men to hold on and "fight it out like Australians."<sup>160</sup>

<sup>152</sup> Lieut. G. C. Smith, 13th Bn. Grocer; of Bathurst, N.S.W.; b. Bathurst, 14 Aug., 1891.

<sup>153</sup> Capt. J. M. Cooney, 13th Bn. Farmer; of Condobolin, N.S.W.; b. Wellington, N.S.W., 17 Aug., 1891.

<sup>154</sup> Lieut. F. M. Culverwell, 16th Bn. Timber worker; of Collie, W. Aust.; b. Dalwood, Devonshire, Eng., 25 May, 1889.

<sup>155</sup> Lieutenant Stones had previously been sent by Murray to search with Captain Lanagan a dugout that had been used by German signallers, and to send back any papers found. He went through the papers, left the dugout, and sent off the packet, when he found the German attack almost upon him. Lanagan, who stayed to finish his task in the dugout, came out shortly afterwards to find the Germans all round him, and was captured.

<sup>156</sup> A. Breton. (241, Pte. L. J. L. Briand, M.M.; 16th Bn. Labourer; of East Guildford, W. Aust.; b. St. Malo France, 1883.)

<sup>157</sup> Then situated, according to one of its members, Private A. T. Lord (of Petersham, N.S.W.), 13th Battalion, "four bays" from O.G.2 (Lord died on 9 Dec., 1940.)

<sup>158</sup> Sgt. G. P. Cross (No. 1504; 13th Bn.) Clerk; of Kogarah, N.S.W.; b. Lambeth, London, Eng., 16 Aug., 1888. Killed in action, 11 April, 1917.

<sup>159</sup> Cpl. J. C. Wheeler (No. 2011; 15th Bn.). Grazier; of Cloncurry, Q'land; b. Manly, N.S.W., 14 Aug., 1890.

<sup>160</sup> According to Private W. E. Ramsden (of Brisbane; died 5 Jan., 1929), who was present. Elsewhere the authenticity of the message was also questioned—for example, by Lieutenant A. V. Watkinson (of Warwick, Q'land), 15th Battalion, fighting on the right.

Meanwhile on the right in O.G.1 when only eight bombs were left, Lieutenant Stones was wounded. Company Sergeant-Major Compton<sup>161</sup> and a few men continued to hold after the last bomb was thrown, but the Germans, flowing into a communication trench on their flank, enfiladed and captured them. Lieutenant Smith, twice wounded but still where Gardiner had placed him to direct the men, was taken prisoner, as was Gardiner himself when all other members of his party had been wounded, and their last bomb thrown, and the enemy had suddenly appeared behind them. The posts on the left in O.G.1 received no order to withdraw, and, after their bombs ran out, the Germans apparently crept along outside the parados of the trench and entered it through a sally-port in rear of the Australians. After firing two drums from their Lewis guns and destroying as far as possible their machine-guns, the flank posts, being entirely cut off, surrendered.

The attack on the left of the 4th Brigade in O.G.2 had begun shortly after that on the right. It cut off and captured the remnant which to the last held on there—Lieutenant Dodd, still engaged with the destruction of the machine-guns;<sup>162</sup> Corporal Wheeler's post which, out in the open, had been firing on Germans now advancing there; Lieutenants Missingham,<sup>163</sup> Binnington,<sup>164</sup> and Ingram (15th) and a few men from the centre, who had managed to gather several bombs and had spent them in carrying out Gardiner's order to hold on while others escaped.

A considerable number were enabled to reach O.G.1. Just ahead of the enemy bombers, with an occasional grenade flying over him, Murray had been heard shepherding the men towards the exit and urging them to run the gauntlet back through the wire. "There's two things now," he said, again and again. "Either capture, or go into that!"

"That" (says a diarist who records the episode) was the frightful German machine-gun fire on the open stretch behind the trenches.

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<sup>161</sup> C.S.M. A. R. Compton (No. 1838; 13th Bn.). Coachsmith; of Leichhardt, N.S.W.; b. Leichhardt, 10 Sept., 1894.

<sup>162</sup> Concerning one sector, a survivor states: "After the death of Lieutenant O'Donnell (14th), it was *saufé qui pent*." The activity of this officer is mentioned by several. (O'Donnell belonged to Gisborne, Vic.)

<sup>163</sup> Capt. W. S. Missingham, 15th Bn. Farmer; of Kumbia, Q'land; b. Albion Park, N.S.W., 1 Sept., 1892.

<sup>164</sup> Capt. E. Binnington, 15th Bn. School teacher; of Maryborough, Q'land; b. Goodwood, Q'land, 14 June, 1895.

Lieutenant Watson<sup>165</sup> (16th), with his arm hanging broken at his side, moved among the troops giving the same advice. In other parts the order came in the form "Every man for himself," and "*Sauve qui peut*," and practically all troops who received it made the attempt. A number jumped over the parapets of O.G.I and made across the open. Others left the trench through sally-ports.<sup>166</sup> But German machine-gunners, laying their guns on the exit of one of these saps, killed men after man endeavouring to escape. The general fire sweeping the open cut down a large number, including many leaders in the fight such as Captains Fletcher (13th), and Hummerston and Somerville (16th); it was far too deadly to allow a line to be formed in the shell-holes, nor, indeed, did many shell-holes exist. But of the four battalions nine officers,<sup>167</sup> including Captains Murray (13th) and Wadsworth (14th), and a remnant of other ranks succeeded in reaching the old Australian front.

As the Germans moved along O.G.I they rolled bombs into the dugouts. In these were only the wounded, mainly serious cases, since Captain Dunworth, now lying there weak with loss of blood, had, on the first news of danger, ordered all lightly wounded men to leave the trench and attempt to escape. On the German bombs exploding at the foot of the stairs, the two German orderlies explained to their countrymen that only wounded men were present. The bombing ceased, and the wounded were captured and afterwards taken to the rear.<sup>168</sup> By 11.45 the whole of the 4th Brigade's position had been re-won by the Germans, who forthwith issued into No-Man's Land, advanced along the front of their trenches, and made prisoners all who were sheltering there in the sallyports and craters.

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<sup>165</sup> Lieut. J. H. Watson, 16th Bn. Farmer; of Yornaning, W. Aust.; b. Mount Gambier, S. Aust., 1 Oct., 1889.

<sup>166</sup> Two openings were used, one near the right, another near the Noreuil road.

<sup>167</sup> These were: 13th Battalion—Captain H. W. Murray and Lieutenants B. C. J. Rose and W. Parsonage; 14th—Captain W. R. Wadsworth and Lieutenants R. E. Hayes and G. H. Clarendon-Hyde; 15th—none; 16th—Lieutenants J. S. Kerr, W. Burrows, and D. S. Aarons.

<sup>168</sup> The work of Lieutenant W. J. G. Lyon (of Surrey Hills, Vic.), 14th Battalion, himself a prisoner among the wounded in the trench at this anxious moment is gratefully spoken of by several of them.

In the 12th Brigade's sector O.G.2 had not been immediately attacked, though as a precaution, on the outbreak of the bombardment officers of the 48th at once patrolled their trench from end to end. In O.G.1 the warning was less obvious, but Major Waine was rendered most anxious by the apparent inattention of headquarters to messages in which both he and Lieutenant Master had endeavoured to impress upon it the dangerous weakness of the 46th and the threatening movement of the enemy. It turned out that most of these missives had failed to arrive, and a message just received from Colonel Denham made it appear that headquarters believed the situation to be much more secure than it was. Actually the 46th was not only weak but desperately tired, having held the front line for three days before the attack.

Intending to word a message so as to seize headquarters with the full truth, Major Waine and Captain North went to the dugout entrance and, sitting near the top of the stair, began its composition. They were in the midst of this when several bombs crashed about the entrance, and some men who had been standing there were sent tumbling down the stairs, carrying the two officers with them. Several other officers were in the dugout, resting—too many, perhaps, for the security of the trench. It had two exits, and Captain North and several others, who at once rushed up that nearest to the Germans, succeeded in escaping capture, although the enemy's bombs were falling over and around them. Those who, like Waine, made for the second exit found their way blocked by the wounded crowding the dark passage, and on returning to the first, found themselves trapped by German sentries and were made prisoners.

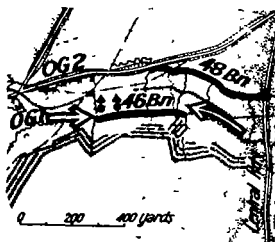
What had happened was that the right flank of the 46th had given way. The post there was held by a few men under Lieutenants Walker<sup>169</sup> and Pentland, the latter of whom, though badly shaken in the first attack,<sup>170</sup> had pluckily returned to the front with a carrying party. At 11.15 a shower of some twenty stick-grenades suddenly exploded in and around this post, wounding some of its members, including Pentland.

<sup>169</sup> Lieut. F. Walker, 46th Bn. Clerk, of Benalla, Vic.; b. Benalla, 27 Mar., 1890. Killed in action, 11 April, 1917.

<sup>170</sup> See p. 307.



The Victorians replied with half-a-dozen bombs, all that the post then possessed. As the enemy continued to attack, the two officers and three surviving men scrambled out of the trench into shell-holes.<sup>171</sup> Bombing along the trench the Württembergers were next faced by Lieutenants Stanton<sup>172</sup> and Master and a corporal who, with a few bombs and rifles, tried to hold them, but were driven back along the empty trench. They eventually escaped, Master being seriously wounded as he withdrew, Stanton knocked unconscious by a bomb but recovering in time to scramble from the trench before the Germans caught him. The 46th had been completely driven out. The Germans occupied the trench, and the wounded Australians in the dugouts and a few unwounded were captured.<sup>173</sup> In the front trench the 48th, utterly unconscious of these occurrences 150 yards in its rear, by which it had been completely cut off, continued to snipe at Germans advancing in twos and threes from Hendecourt.



Situation quiet (wrote Captain Leane at 11.20 in a message of which a copy was found later in his message book). Two Vickers guns have not reported yet. These would be invaluable in staving off a counter-attack, as at present, owing to being held up on both flanks, we are in the air. These are very securely held and blocks established, and my position is as strong as it could be made. Trench-mortars would be invaluable, and I would very much like to get at Fritz with them.

Spectators in rear had seen with growing anxiety the white puffs from the German bombs gradually advancing

<sup>171</sup> Private G. R. Arndell (of Apsley, Vic.), resting his left hand on the parapet in the effort to get more range, had it blown off by an enemy bomb. In the retirement Lieutenant Walker was killed and Lieutenant Pentland badly wounded.

<sup>172</sup> Lieut. J. A. Stanton, M.C.; 46th Bn. Clerk; of Stawell, Vic.; b. Stawell, 29 Sept., 1892. (Cousin of Captain F. B. Stanton, 14th Bn.)

<sup>173</sup> William Evans (of Penshurst, Vic.)—batman of Major J. M. Edgley, of Dorrigo, N.S.W., 46th Battalion, who was left out of this fight—had begged to be allowed to take part, and, obtaining leave, had fought throughout with Captain Boddington. In the final stage of the fight, Evans found himself isolated, and was captured. His captor took him along the trench and met another German, who apparently urged that it was better sport to mount the fire-step and shoot down the retiring Australians. The two became so intent on their firing that they forgot Evans. Seeing a dead Australian at his feet, Evans stooped down under pretence of tying a bootlace, felt the dead man's pockets for a bomb, and, finding one, placed it quietly, with the pin drawn, between the feet of the Germans. He then slipped round the next traverse, and a second later, hearing the bomb explode, leapt over the parapots. He succeeded in reaching the Australian lines.

along the parapets of the 4th Brigade's sector, and the rare tawny burst of an Australian bomb in reply. Figures had next been observed calmly undertaking some business in the open—probably Germans now bombing from the parapet, or the last Australian charge in reply. Presently a string of others was seen leaping over some barrier in the trench with their hands above their heads, and many onlookers with a cold shock realised that they were watching for the first time the surrender of a number of Australian soldiers. Then, at 11.30, the parapets became dotted with men who climbed over it and began to move like a scattered crowd across the open. All observers knew that they were looking on at the loss of the trenches. At 11.15 Colonel Leane of the 48th telegraphed to the 12th Brigade Headquarters that both brigades were retiring and asked for an artillery barrage. Five minutes later Lieutenant Aarons reached the Headquarters of the 14th and 16th, bringing—but too late—his warning of the intended withdrawal.<sup>174</sup> The struggle with the artillery commanders over the question of the barrage had fortunately been ended.<sup>175</sup> Shortly after 11 a barrage was laid by the field artillery on the south-eastern face of Bullecourt, and about 11.45 the artillery at last opened on the Hindenburg Line opposite the whole of the 4th Australian Division's front. This barrage was not, indeed, in time to prevent grievous loss in the first stage of withdrawal, but greatly assisted its subsequent stages.

An hour later, while the field artillery was still playing on the Hindenburg parapets and the "heavies" on Bullecourt and Riencourt; after a remnant of the brigades had straggled in, the machine-gunners of the 4th by a brave effort bringing with them two of their sixteen guns; while the line of wounded, followed by shells from some German battery, was

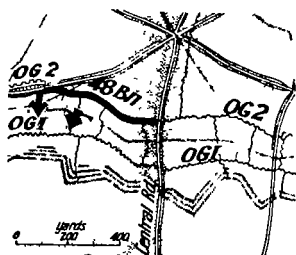
<sup>174</sup> At 11.30 Sergeant W. P. Boland (of Lancefield, Vic.) of the 14th brought in a message sent just before the decision to retire, saying that the 46th could be seen falling back, but that the 14th, though without bombs, hoped to hold till dusk.

<sup>175</sup> The 4th Division having definitely concluded about 11 that its troops were not in the village, a bombardment of Bullecourt by heavy artillery and a barrage of that flank by field-guns had been arranged by 11.10. At that hour, however, there arrived a message dropped from an aeroplane to the effect that troops, apparently British, had been seen in the south-west corner of the village. The general bombardment of the village was therefore postponed, but, as the flank of the 12th Brigade was known to be in great difficulty, a barrage was laid down to protect it.

trailing like a string of ants across the open to the rear—there suddenly appeared, slowly returning from the sector of the Hindenburg Line captured that morning by the 12th Brigade, about 150 men.

About 12.30 (notes an observer in his diary) I saw some men quietly moving through the end of the wire, some of them looking back and talking to the others, it seemed. You would have said they were a party of our men out planning to put down a strong-post, so quietly did they take it.

They were the 48th Battalion. No word of the retirement had reached it from the 46th, but a man of the 47th, Private Dunnett,<sup>176</sup> on his own initiative, came to O.G.2 and reported the event to Captain Leane. About the same time some of the 48th had observed Germans in the trench in rear, and had opened on them with rifles and Lewis guns. The retirement of the 4th Brigade also was observed. Captain Leane had at once held a hurried conference with Lieutenants McKenzie,<sup>177</sup> Dennis, Jones, and Watson, and decided to form two small parties to bomb down two communication trenches and retake O.G.1. Entrusting one party to Jones, and leading the other himself, he at once made the attack. The fighting (says Sergeant Downes,<sup>178</sup> who was present) was "very willing."<sup>179</sup> the Germans coming at the bombing parties several times. As these reached O.G.1, Leane was wounded and Jones killed, but part of the 46th's trench was retaken, and for a time the 48th held this as well as its own.<sup>180</sup> The Australian barrage, however, was now falling on the trenches and causing loss, and, although ground flares were lit to attract the attention of a patrolling



<sup>176</sup> Lieut. H. L. Dunnett, M.M.; 47th Bn. Locomotive fireman; of Rockhampton, Q'land; b. Rockhampton, 1 Sept., 1898.

<sup>177</sup> Capt. S. N. McKenzie, 48th Bn. Farmer; of Marchagee, W. Aust.; b. Birmingham, Eng., 5 Jan., 1895.

<sup>178</sup> Lieut.-Col. H. Downes, M.C., M.M.; 48th Bn. Sharebroker's authorised clerk, of Adelaide, b. Eaglehawk, Vic., 14 May, 1892. Died 11 Nov., 1931.

<sup>179</sup> Australian for "keen" or "vehement."

<sup>180</sup> In the 46th's trench were found a few unexpended bombs, and officers of the 48th afterwards expressed some natural indignation at what they considered the premature withdrawal of the Victorians without warning them. One officer had even told his men to fire on some of that battalion who were seen to surrender, in his opinion, too easily. The situation of the 46th, however, and its extreme weakness in numbers, were quite unknown to the 48th, who were therefore not in a position to judge fairly.

aeroplane and S.O.S. signals were fired for the artillery, the shells continued to fall there. Captain Leane decided that his force was not strong enough to hold both lines, and, after sending an orderly<sup>181</sup> to burn all military papers at his headquarters in O.G.2,<sup>182</sup> withdrew the garrison of that trench to O.G.1 and blocked the avenue by which they retired. Then, as the bombardment continued, at 12.5 he sent a runner with the message:

Our artillery is making trench untenable.

At 12.25 bombs ran short on the right, and it was evident that under this shell-fire, combined with the attack by the Germans on both flanks and down the communication trench, the position could not be held. Captain Leane accordingly decided to withdraw. All the wounded were first attended to and placed in the entrances of the dugouts. Leane directed the officers and some N.C.O's to watch the barricade till the men were clear, and then gave the word for withdrawal.

So, a full hour after every other battalion had left the trenches, the 48th came out—under heavy rifle and machine-gun fire, but with proud deliberation and studied nonchalance, at walking pace, picking their way through the broken wire, carrying a proportion of their Lewis guns,<sup>183</sup> carefully helping the walking wounded, and with their officers bringing up the rear. Wherever Australians fought, that characteristic gait was noted by friend and enemy,<sup>184</sup> but never did it furnish such a spectacle as here. For ten minutes the attention of half the battlefield was held while, leisurely as a crowd leaving its daily work, the 48th drew clear. Many were killed in withdrawing, many were wounded and lay about the wire until captured or put to death by a merciful enemy.<sup>185</sup> Lieutenant Watson (the 48th's intelligence officer), who left the trench with Captain Leane, was shot through the spine but dragged himself to shelter, was brought in, and died

<sup>181</sup> Pte. N. McLeod (No. 1305; 48th Bn.). Electrician; of Sydney; b. Stornoway, Scotland, 15 March, 1880.

<sup>182</sup> Corporal A. F. Franke (of Adelaide), in charge of the telephone apparatus, also destroyed it with a Mills bomb before leaving.

<sup>183</sup> Five Lewis guns were brought out. Several had been destroyed by German fire or bombs, and parts of some of these had been used in repairing others.

<sup>184</sup> Particularly by German officers in the Third Battle of Ypres.

<sup>185</sup> The Germans later working among the wounded in the wire shot some of those who were evidently hurt too badly for recovery. They did the same at Noreuil on March 20.

afterwards in hospital.<sup>186</sup> Captain Leane himself was observed wounded, hopping towards the entanglement. Long afterwards it was heard that he died on May 2nd in a German hospital.

The artillery kept its fire on the German trenches from which some of the enemy were seen to advance; and the 51st and 52nd Battalions (13th Brigade) holding the railway, together with the remnant of the two brigades, prepared to meet the attack which, however unlikely, men always expected after such a repulse. On its being remarked, however, that some of the Germans in No-Man's Land were medical orderlies carrying white bandages to the wounded, messages were hurriedly sent to the machine-guns and artillery, and about 2 o'clock their fire ceased. A number of men from the railway line, exhausted though they were, had voluntarily gone out with stretchers, and, by direction of General Glasgow (13th Brigade), Lieutenant Julin<sup>187</sup> and fifty of the 52nd assisted. The Germans at first fired on the stretcher-bearers, but about 4 p.m., upon Julin's taking his party boldly towards the wire with Red Cross flags flying, this sniping ceased, and for two hours the wounded were collected without impediment, the Germans carrying to their own trenches most of those from the wire, but in a few cases placing badly wounded men beyond its outer edge to be picked up by their opponents. Although they also took full advantage of this informal truce to repair gaps in their wire, the concession was welcomed by every Australian. It lasted till 6 o'clock, when snow began to fall, and the Germans, probably fearing an attack under this screen, shouted "finish hospital!", and both sides withdrew. Nevertheless, throughout the night, which was still and frosty, not a shot was fired, and for several days afterwards odd survivors crawled, or were helped, back to the railway.<sup>188</sup>

So ended the First Battle of Bullecourt. Thrown between two pylons of the enemy's line, despite failure of the tanks

<sup>186</sup> His brother, Lieut. H. H. Watson, also an officer in the 48th, was killed in O.G.2

<sup>187</sup> Lieut. J. H. Julin, M.C.; 52nd Bn. Surveyor and civil engineer; of Ayr, Q'land; b Bundaberg, Q'land, 11 March 1892.

<sup>188</sup> Thus Lieut. W. F. H. Master (46th) was brought in from the German wire by Sergeant R. S. Rafferty (48th) who, seeing him there, had stayed with him till dark. As late as the night of the 15th there came back Privates H. H. Carne and J. M. F. Ryan (47th), who had been in a shell-hole beyond the German wire. (Master belonged to Melbourne and Lake Boga, Vic.; Rafferty to Victoria Park and Bencubbin, W. Aust., Carne to Einasleigh, Q'land; Ryan to Bundaberg, Q'land.)

which were to cut the wire and replace the barrage, the 4th Australian Division had achieved what most soldiers then in France would previously have believed impossible—broken, without artillery barrage, the Hindenburg Line. But when after this, misled by reports of mythical success, the artillery had continued to withhold its support, the German machine-gunners had with impunity closed a gate behind the Australian infantry, and forced it to withstand attack until its supplies ran out, when most of the unwounded survivors made the brave effort to run the gauntlet and escape. The six and a half battalions and accompanying units of the 4th Division engaged lost over 3,000 officers and men, of whom 28 officers and 1,142 men were captured,<sup>189</sup> much the largest number of

<sup>189</sup> This is the number given in the German Official History. The regimental histories and other authorities give numbers varying from 1,125 to 1,168. The Germans also claimed to have captured two tanks within their lines, while seven more lay destroyed within sight of them. They further claimed 53 Lewis guns, 4 Vickers machine-guns, and 2 trench-mortars.

The prisoners were, as already stated, on the whole well treated by their actual captors. Some on the way to the rear were killed or wounded by the Australian barrage, through which some of the wounded were pluckily carried by German stretcher-bearers. For a large batch of the unwounded prisoners, however, this humane treatment ended with their arrival at Lille. Here they were marched through the streets—the French people who tried to make them small gifts being roughly handled—to Fort Macdonald, where they were split into several parties each of about 100. Each party was thrust into a room of the fort to which it is no exaggeration to apply the word "dungeon." These chambers, large enough for perhaps 25 men, were floored with stone or concrete, with little light or air. For all purposes of sanitation, there was placed in the corner a single tub, which quickly overflowed. The men were allowed neither straw nor blankets, but must sleep on the bare damp floor, and were fed with one slice of bread daily, and coffee "substitute." This treatment continued for eight days, and at one stage an official entered the room and explained to the prisoners the reason for it. It was an act of retaliation, he said. The German Government, having ascertained that the British, in defiance of conventions, were employing German prisoners within range of the German guns, had protested to the British Government demanding their withdrawal 30 kilometres from the front line, but no answer had been received from the British Government. "You will be kept," he said, quoting from a printed notice, "very short of food, given bad lodgings, no beds, and hard work beside the German guns under heavy shell-fire. No pay, no soap for washing or shaving, no towels, or boots, etc., etc." He then told them to write to their relations or to persons of influence in England, informing them of their plight and of the reason for it.

Parties were then drafted off and sent to work in the artillery zone on and near the battlefield. They were purposely underfed and overworked, under fire. A certain number, including several Australians died of hardship, and others from shell wounds. Several escaped, including the three men of the 5th Dorset who reached the Australian lines near Bullecourt on April 8, and four Australians—Corporal P. St. J. Job (of Perth, W. Aust.), Lance-Corporals E. G. Smith (of Bunbury, W. Aust.) and H. Parsons (of Narragin, W. Aust.), and Private G. Stewart (of Harrowsmith, W. Aust.), of the 16th Battalion—of whom two, Parsons and Stewart, on May 22 reached the Australian front at the very point at which they had been captured, but the other two were recaptured in trying to make the last few hundred yards. Job died on 25 Nov., 1929.

The complaint against the British command was true enough—through a recklessness that later brought grievous trouble and much suffering to others, German prisoners had, like the Egyptian labourers in Gallipoli, been employed in areas subject to fire. The characteristically brutal methods of the German commanders in retaliation had little effect, except to win for their whole people a reputation

Australians taken by the enemy in a single battle. As few men who were wounded beyond the first wire escaped, the number of prisoners includes a great part of the wounded—for example, of nine captured officers of the 16th Battalion, seven were wounded, of whom one afterwards died.<sup>190</sup> Much the heaviest loss fell on the 4th Brigade, whose casualties amounted to 2,339<sup>191</sup> out of some 3,000 engaged. The particulars are—

			Officers.		Other Ranks.
13th Battalion	..	..	21	..	546
14th Battalion	..	..	19	..	582
15th Battalion	..	..	20	..	380
16th Battalion	..	..	15	..	621
4th M.G. Company	..	..	5	..	99
4th L.T.M. Bty.	..	..	1	..	30

The loss of the 12th Brigade was 950<sup>192</sup>—

			Officers.		Other Ranks.
46th Battalion	..	..	9	..	364
47th Battalion	..	..	4	..	123
48th Battalion	..	..	15	..	421
12th M.G. Company	..	..	—	..	14

Only some 750 of each battalion were actually engaged, the remainder being with headquarters or held in reserve with the "nucleus"<sup>193</sup> (which now included a proportion of N.C.O's and men as well as officers), and the average loss

which, in this generation at least, will continue to do great harm to their country. These measures ended in July, when an arrangement was arrived at for the withdrawal of prisoners to an agreed distance.

Except for such "prisoners of respite," the Australian prisoners on the whole received moderate treatment. There were, of course, cases of brutality by subordinates, and some commandants, like the notorious Niemeyer, succeeded in winning for their countrymen a reputation for the ill-treatment of prisoners. But this was due rather to the stupidity or vindictiveness of certain "dugout" martinets, than to deliberate brutality, and other commanders were fair enough. One Australian—Private A. J. Moore (of North Rockhampton, Q'land)—gratefully acknowledges that his life was saved in hospital "by the kindness and gentle treatment of Princess Marie of Bavaria (Sister Marie Ilka von Wrede)."

In addition to those already mentioned, a fair number of Australians captured at Bullecourt escaped. Among these, Privates J. Lee (14th) and F. A. W. C. Peachey (15th) reached Holland from Lille in November 1917, and Private T. E. Taylor (14th) escaped into Russia. The most famous adventure was that of Captain J. E. Mott (48th), who returned to his battalion and finally became its commander. (Lee belonged to Warrnambool, Vic.; Peachey to South Grafton, N.S.W.; Taylor to Neerim, Vic.; Mott to Apollo Bay, Vic.) Several others, including Captain Gardiner, temporarily escaped, but were caught before crossing the German border.

<sup>190</sup> Lieut. S. B. Smith, 16th Bn. Bank clerk; of Perth, W. Aust.; b. Buninyong, Vic., 11 Aug., 1887. Died of wounds while prisoner of war, 18 April, 1917.

<sup>191</sup> The figures for the casualties of this brigade vary greatly in different records, but those here shown appear to be generally accepted.

<sup>192</sup> The figures for 46th and 47th Battalions are the result of an early check. At the same date the figure for the 4th Brigade was given as 2,058. Allowing for the same ratio of error, the correct figure for the 12th Brigade would be about 1,050, and the total for the division slightly under 3,500.

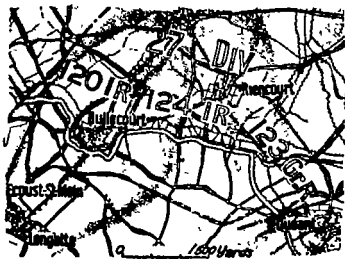
<sup>193</sup> See Vol III, p 493.

was therefore almost exactly two-thirds of those who entered the fight.<sup>194</sup> The survivors, worn out with two nights and days of strain and labour, were withdrawn, marching on the third night through the snow to the neighbourhood of Bapaume, where, after much waiting, they entrained for the Albert area and forthwith marched to huddled camps on the old Somme field. The 48th Battalion marched into "Crucifix Camp" with brave show, singing.

It remains to give the German side of the narrative, which is fully ascertainable, the history of every regiment present, as well as those of the artillery and of the division, the corps commander's diary and the official account of the Battle of Arras being available, besides a record courteously furnished through the *Reichsarchiv*.

#### German narratives

Five days before the battle the 26th Reserve (Württemberg) Division, which since March 18 had been opposing the left of I Anzac, began to be relieved by another Wurttemberg division, the 27th. The three incoming regiments—the 124th I.R. holding precisely the sector attacked by both Australian brigades, the 123rd<sup>195</sup> to the east (near Quéant), and the 120th to the west (in Bullecourt)—were fresh from their training ground south of Valenciennes, where they had been stationed since withdrawal from St. Pierre Vaast Wood on March 16. Their morale was high; the besetting conviction of leaders that armies can only maintain their high spirits when acting on the offensive and that a defensive attitude tends to demoralise them, however great the benefits accruing from it, had been entirely belied in the German withdrawal. The intelligence staff of Gough's army had noted that the enemy's morale showed no deterioration. Both the Crown Prince Rupprecht, commanding the group of armies, and Lieutenant-General Otto von Moser, commanding the XIV Reserve Corps (Quéant Group),<sup>196</sup> which was opposed to I Anzac, observed that the spirit



<sup>194</sup> In the 4th Machine Gun Company, of 5 officers, 110 men, and 16 guns that went forward, only 1 officer, 15 men (3 of them wounded), and 2 guns returned. The two gunners who brought out these guns were, according to one account, killed by a shell after reaching the Australian line.

<sup>195</sup> This regiment bore its traditional title of the "Ulm Grenadier Regiment," but was in no other respect different from other infantry regiments, and is generally referred to in this text as the 123rd I.R.

<sup>196</sup> See note 38 on p. 161.



of their men was actually improved by the withdrawal. Several Australians—not only of the 4th Division—have recorded their opinion that these Wurttembergers were the stubbornest opponents they ever encountered.

It will, however, surprise most Australians to know that the Wurttemberg units, on coming into the Hindenburg Line, were painfully disillusioned by finding these famous defences to be incomplete and ill-equipped. The corps commander, on his first visit to them, on March 21, had been shocked by their condition, and had ordered drastic steps for their improvement. The shallow concrete dugouts that were to have replaced the deep chambers in which so many troops had been captured on the Somme, had been begun, but left unfinished through the effect of frost on the concrete, and were represented merely by large rectangular excavations in front of the trenches, with the steel bars of the reinforcement sticking up from the bottom like the spines of a hedgehog.<sup>197</sup> The 26th Reserve, "a famous building division," had met the emergency by setting its unoccupied battalions to dig, day and night, deep dugouts of the ordinary type,<sup>198</sup> but many of these, as has been seen, were barely begun, and in others the exit was still by ladder. The numerous short communication trenches between O.G.1 and 2 had also been hastily dug, but few existed beyond those lines,<sup>199</sup> and none beyond Riencourt, to which point battalions must move over the open. On the other hand Riencourt itself contained deep, safe dugouts. Above all, "the wire-entanglements were deep and good."<sup>200</sup>

When the troops came in, the bombardment at Arras was in full blast, and the corps commander had, from its commencement, felt that his front also would be attacked. He ordered his divisions to draw their enemy's teeth by themselves attacking on a small scale, whenever possible, and to prevent, by artillery-fire, a close approach to the Hindenburg Line. The artillery, however, could not stop the approach. In case of attack he arranged for artillery support from the neighbouring corps. "The question of tanks and the anxiety concerning them are grave," he wrote in his diary on April 8, "since they constitute a new means of warfare—unknown, exercising a strong moral effect on our infantry, and we have as yet no experience in effectively dealing with them. I order, therefore, that they must . . . be fired on, not only by the special anti-tank guns built in near the firing line, but generally by every field or heavy battery that perceives one approaching; and in addition, when they come closer, by the machine-guns provided with the new steel bullets."<sup>201</sup> He also on April 4 urged that his artillery should be strengthened, the barrage for his front—with a battery for each 600 metres—being too weak. The subordinate staffs and the troops were thoroughly alive to the

<sup>197</sup> Some Australians who saw them during the attack thought these holes were traps for tanks or for cavalry.

<sup>198</sup> A few of these had been begun, but the *History of the 119th R.I.R.* (26th Res. Division) says that their entrances were cramped, and the head cover as shallow as 9 feet. There were also no buried cables for communication. The II/119th put in 5,000 dugout frames.

<sup>199</sup> For example, between the Cannstatter Graben and Bullecourt—nearly a mile—there was no communication trench from the rear, and all troops had to move over the open.

<sup>200</sup> *Histories of the 123rd and 124th I.R.*

<sup>201</sup> *Feldzugs-aufzeichnungen*, by General Otto v. Moser, p. 264. At this time the German anti-tank artillery consisted of six special guns per army corps, and certain guns of the field artillery specially told off to fire on tanks over open sights.

special difficulty and importance of their position, if attacked while the British were thrusting from Arras. The afternoon of the 9th, indeed, when the German line at Arras had been broken on a wider front than ever before and the gap not yet sealed, was a time of keen anxiety, and a machine-gun company of the 123rd I.R. was sent off to l'Esperance farm in case the British cavalry broke through.<sup>202</sup> But on the 10th (according to the historian of that regiment) this danger had ended. The systematic cutting of the wire in front of Riencourt strongly confirmed the corps commander's notion that his front would be attacked. "Yet," says the historian of the 120th I.R., "the fact that in front of the trenches of the regiment and of its neighbours up to April 9 not a single hostile infantryman, much less an enemy trench, was to be seen, caused the danger of an extension of the offensive to appear somewhat incredible."

Australians will also be surprised to learn that the presence of the two Australian brigades crowded on the snow in front of the 124th Regiment in the dawn of April 10, and their withdrawal in the snow-storm, were not detected by that regiment or by the 123rd near Quéant, though they were apparently seen by the 120th holding Bullecourt. But this regiment (which a few hours earlier had suffered casualties by the gas attack) found itself assaulted at dawn on the 10th by the 62nd British Division,<sup>203</sup> and its staff evidently connected with that assault whatever glimpse was obtained of the Australians. The historian of the 120th concludes that an attack had been defeated by the "prompt and well placed" barrage of the German artillery, but he is obviously puzzled, and adds that the operation of April 10th "may be looked on as a powerful reconnaissance."<sup>204</sup> It is doubtful if it gave any warning beyond emphasising the general probability of attack.<sup>205</sup>

But late in the afternoon of the 10th, German observers, both on the ground and in the air, detected large bodies of troops south of Bullecourt, and these signs, in addition to the unusually heavy shelling of Hendecourt, Riencourt, and Cagnicourt during the night, caused the local German command to warn the garrison and reserves and order the artillery to increase its fire. The II Battalion of the 124th I.R. was sent up from reserve to the "artillery defence line" and sunken roads in front of Riencourt. The bombardment of

<sup>202</sup> General von Moser also lent the IX Reserve Corps three battalions of the 26th Reserve Division and a battery.

<sup>203</sup> The attack by strong detachments of the West Yorks—see pp 283-4. Seven British soldiers, "mostly wounded," were captured in the German wire; 5.45 is the hour given for this attack in the regimental history of the 120th I.R. (At this time the hours of the day on both sides of the line were the same. The Germans were usually an hour ahead, but they did not change to "summer time" until midnight on April 19, whereas the British watches had been advanced on midnight, March 24.)

<sup>204</sup> *History of the 120th I.R.*, p. 65.

<sup>205</sup> The historians of the 124th and 123rd I.R., against which the attack was ultimately delivered, though aware that Bullecourt had been "energetically attacked" at dawn on the 10th, have obviously never heard of any movement in front of their own regiments on that day, and prisoners of the 124th taken next day said they had known nothing of any attack until 4 a.m. on the 11th. The diary of General von Moser, the corps commander, makes no mention of the Australian assault. Statements made by German intelligence officers to captured officers and men of the 4th Brigade are worthless as evidence, since it was the normal practice of intelligence officers to pretend that they knew by observation, or through their secret service, facts which they had learned a few minutes before from other prisoners. At Fromelles, for example, German officers pretended to prisoners that they had known beforehand all particulars of the coming attack, when their knowledge was really derived from an order found on the body of an officer during the attack (see Vol. III, p 442).

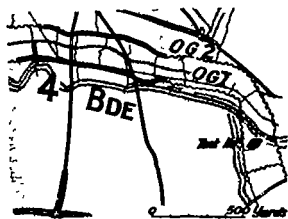
Bullecourt by artillery and gas projectors did not this night catch the garrison unawares; the German artillery and trench-mortars were ready and, in reply, searched the area around Ecoust through which any attack on Bullecourt was expected to come. At 4.25 the reserves of the XIV Reserve Corps were ordered to "stand to."

The Württembergers were thus prepared for an attack, but "the method of its execution came as a surprise."<sup>206</sup> At 2 a.m. the posts of the 124th, and at 3 those of the 123rd, detected the sound of petrol engines. It was only faintly heard through the artillery-fire, but tanks were at once suspected, and, seeing that, on the right, Bullecourt was being heavily shelled, the companies were alarmed. At 4.30 hostile troops were seen working at the wire-entanglements,<sup>207</sup> and at 4.45 the motor engines sounded louder, evidently approaching. Shortly afterwards the central regiment (124th) made out several tanks, followed by "five lines" of infantry and denser columns in rear, approaching its sector, while, on the Quéant flank, the advanced posts of the 123rd (beyond the eastern edge of the Australian objective) descried a single tank 500 yards from the centre of their front. "At a speed of about 4 miles an hour it approached the entanglement, firing. After a short halt it moved along, crossed it easily . . . and then enfiladed with its fire our front line. Here for the first time our grenadiers<sup>208</sup> encountered one of these famous monsters. . . . It would be untrue to attempt to deny that the slowly advancing tank, which there was apparently no means of stopping, had a strong moral effect and succeeded in crippling the resistance. But the first fright soon passed."

The tank had crossed the wire at the northern end of the Balkon Stellung and about half-a-mile from Quéant. It now crossed the first "Balcony" trench, but as it moved towards the second it became the target for concentrated fire by artillery, trench-mortars, and from battalion headquarters there was hurried forward a machine-gun,<sup>209</sup> which from 150 yards poured into it 1,200 armour-piercing bullets. The Germans afterwards ascertained that seventy of these bullets passed through the tank—one of the sharp shocks of this fight for the tank crews was to find steel bullets passing through the tank walls. In this case they tried to manœuvre, but the tank burst into flames. The survivors, with burns and bullet wounds, attempted to escape, but were captured.<sup>210</sup>

The sector of the 123rd I.R. lay outside that of the Australian attack, and its commander at once ordered its two westernmost companies to support the shattered left of the 124th on which the assault by the 4th Australian Brigade fell.

The 124th had two battalions in the Hindenburg Line and the other in the "artillery defence line." Each of the forward battalions



<sup>206</sup> *History of the 123rd I R*, p. 93.

<sup>207</sup> This is probably a mis-report; possibly a patrol was seen or some sign of the assembly of the tanks.

<sup>208</sup> That is to say, the men of this "grenadier" regiment.

<sup>209</sup> It was brought forward and fired by the machine-gun company commander himself, Lieutenant of Reserve Schabel.

<sup>210</sup> This tank, far away to the right, can be identified on a British as well as on a German air-photograph.

had three companies in the Hindenburg Line and one in reserve, the forward companies having two platoons in O.G.1 and the third in O.G.2. It was against the III Battalion that the attack of the 4th Australian Brigade fell. The garrison was obviously scared by the tanks,<sup>211</sup> and quickly driven from nearly its whole line. It was part of the reserve company which retook the Calwer Graben (Emu Alley) and lost it again; the German history attributes this loss to "a false report that the troops in it were cut off."

The troops in Bullecourt, past whom the 12th Brigade brushed in its advance, were those of the left battalion of the 120th I.R., who, after waiting ready "until the bombardment lifted," observed the "well drawn-up, serried waves" accompanied by tanks "approaching at a quick pace. A few seconds later (says their historian) our machine-guns took terrible toll of the assaulting masses." The 12th Brigade's attack fell on the right of the I/124th, whose right company is said to have fired seventy cartridges per man before being driven out. Its reserve platoon at once counter-attacked, but the company commander was killed bombing at the head of his men, who were forced back into the sunken road. The gap between the Australian brigades was held by the 2nd and 3rd companies of this battalion. The tank which became tangled in the wire in front of them was four times hit by trench-mortar bombs, and a machine-gun fired through it with steel ammunition.

To prevent further penetration the Germans, as well as the Australians, barricaded their trenches. The main counter-attack was ordered at 7 o'clock by the commander of the 27th Division. The artillery of the 2nd Guard Reserve Division on the left, as well as that of the 220th Division on the right, fired "with all pieces"<sup>212</sup> on to the front of the 27th Division, and the corps commander ordered the 8-inch howitzers under his command to join in.<sup>213</sup> According to the German Official History, before receiving the order the commander of the III/124th planned and launched the infantry attack against the 4th Australian Brigade and the right of the 12th, assuming command for that purpose of all companies of the II Battalion, which had been sent up to the "Artillery Protection Line." He threw in two of its companies through Ostrich Avenue, and two across the open east of Emu Alley, down which his own 9th company attacked. The 123rd and remnants of the III/124th attacked up the trenches from the east. On the western flank the 120th could not so actively assist, but movement was begun by all three regiments at about 9 o'clock. When eventually, taken on all sides, the Australians began to surrender, the storm detachments, elated by the sight of prisoners being sent off in troops to the rear, swarmed over the open and completed the work. All the German narratives proudly claim that the counter-attack was carried out as if on the practice ground near Valenciennes, and drew praise from the captured Australian officers who, "like real sportsmen," were full of admiration for the Württemberg "stosstrupps," and

<sup>211</sup> The regimental historian says that several tanks combed the parapet with their fire and shot down the garrison—evidently a report from frightened men, since the position of the tanks is known beyond doubt, and their distant fire in this sector was harmless.

<sup>212</sup> According to General von Moser's diary

<sup>213</sup> The big black bursts of the 8-inch shell on the sunken road in front of the railway were remarked by the Australians.

described the counter-attack as a splendid action." The loss of the Germans was 749,<sup>214</sup> which was reasonably regarded as light in relation to the casualties of their enemy and the brilliance of their own success. The 27th Division bracketed this day with one other as the most glorious in its annals. The corps commander notes that "this victory was especially pleasing to the Army, and indeed to the High Command for three reasons: first, a break-through would have been extremely grave, for the enemy would have turned the whole Arras front; second, it restored morale after the disasters of the 9th and 10th April east of Arras; third, it to a great extent removed the nightmare concerning tanks and increased the confidence in our means of defence." There was intense relief at the discovery that tanks were so vulnerable. Seven derelicts were visible in front of the line, and two lay behind the first trench. Parties came from afar to inspect them; their mechanism was studied, the bullet-holes counted, and staff monographs written suggesting improvements in defence against them.

Gough's message to the 4th Australian Division at the close of the day—that he was "satisfied that the effect upon the whole situation by the Anzac attack has been of great assistance"—was perhaps justifiable encouragement; but, throughout the circumscribed region in which the truth was known, everyone was aware that the 4th Australian Division had been employed in an experiment of extreme rashness, persisted in by the army commander after repeated warnings, and that the experiment had failed with shocking loss. The plans of the Anzac staff and commanders had not, it is true, been free from mistakes.<sup>215</sup> It was probably an error to separate the objectives of the two brigades. Though the intention was simply to avoid loss and the gap was to be covered by no less than four tanks, yet these tanks dwindled to the one which was caught in the wire, and throughout the fight the enemy was enabled to draw reinforcements and supplies through Ostrich Avenue, which ran into this gap. Again, the allotting of only three machine-guns to cover the sound of the tanks *before* "zero" was a serious error, due to the fact that the staffs were inexperienced

<sup>214</sup> Including 42 prisoners. The 123rd lost in all 49, the 124th 434, the 120th 257, and the artillery 9; the casualties of the 120th probably include those inflicted by the gas attack on April 10, when its I Battalion suffered greatly.

<sup>215</sup> The staff of the tank corps blamed the I Anzac Corps for not having sufficiently guarded its right against counter-attack, and Gough probably held this view, for he ordered that this flank should be strengthened, especially by machine-guns, in the next attempt. Actually there were ample machine-guns in position, the gunners eagerly waiting to protect the right, but the guns could not be employed against Germans in trenches.

in tank-warfare.<sup>216</sup> Had the tanks not been heard, more might have reached the wire, not, indeed, before the infantry, but in time to be of use. Again, the error in battalion orders, which caused the 46th to wait for the tanks instead of advancing at 4.45, caused loss and confusion which might have been avoided had the 12th Brigade advanced in the dark and while the barrage was still on Bullecourt. Yet this error would have been immaterial had the main plan not broken down. As for the artillery, its counter-battery fire was practically ineffective (as the loss of only nine men in the German artillery shows). This was probably due partly to uncertainty as to the German battery positions. The reports of some artillery observers throughout the day were strangely unreliable, and had the deplorable effect of robbing the infantry of protection by barrage.<sup>217</sup>

But, despite their results, all these were errors in detail which faded in importance before the gross blunders of the general plan. Any attempt by the immediate commanders of the troops to conceal their realisation of these would have been worse than useless, and Generals Birdwood and Brand took the wisest course when, in addressing the 4th Brigade in its bitter depression some days after the action, they disclosed to the men "with tears in their eyes"<sup>218</sup> their unsuccessful effort to have the plans altered. Gough's tactics at Bullecourt have, indeed, never found a defender. Even Dewar and Boraston, authors not prone to criticise a British general, admit that "the scheme of the attack . . . perhaps asked too much both of men and machines at this stage of their training and development." It was indeed employed by British instructors afterwards as an example of how an attack should not be undertaken.

I have heard a lecturer say (writes Major Watson) that to attack the Hindenburg Line on a front of fifteen hundred yards without support on either flank was rash.

<sup>216</sup> In the I Anzac Corps records is a note written after the battle by Major R. H. Osborne (of Bangaroo, N.S.W.), G.S.O.2, to the effect that the commander of the tank company had told him that experiments showed tanks to be inaudible at more than 450 yards. Osborne added that he had felt sure that this was incorrect.

<sup>217</sup> The great difficulty of distinguishing the colour of uniforms and other objects against the snow has been referred to. Even Major Selmes, who insisted on laying the fire of his battery in front of the captured position (*see p. 329*), thought that he saw at one time a captured tank and Australian prisoners escorted into Hendecourt. The object must have been some German lorry—one waggon came by error out of Riencourt, and was hastily turned back by the German infantry.

<sup>218</sup> Diary of Lieutenant E. J. Rule, 14th Bn.

And those who commented thus were far from knowing the full facts—the wild haste of the undertaking, the repeated warnings against it, the extent of the failure of the tanks. Gough's general conception of assisting the Third Army by a stroke at the enemy's exposed flank and rear was indeed sound, provided a practicable means of delivering that stroke could be discovered. But, with almost boyish eagerness to deliver a death blow, the army commander broke at every stage through rules recognised even by platoon commanders. He attempted a deep penetration on a narrow front, and that at the head of a deep re-entrant. When, despite impetuous efforts, he was unable to bring forward his artillery and ammunition in time to cut the wire, he adopted, on the spur of the moment, a scheme devised by an inexperienced officer of an experimental arm, and called the attack on again for the following morning. Finally, after the tanks, on the first trial, had confirmed the worst fears of his subordinates, he insisted on repeating the identical operation next day. Within two hours of the attack being delivered every one of his impetuous predictions was being paid for by the crushing of the magnificent force which had been given him to handle.

How far Haig must share with Gough moral responsibility for this disaster—for such it was—the available evidence does not suffice to determine. In later times Generals Birdwood and White sometimes regretted that, on receiving the Commander-in-Chief's order to go on with the attack, they had not insisted upon ascertaining whether Haig was aware of Gough's tactical plan. It is possible that he was not, since the task of a supreme commander could only be discharged by leaving the details to skilled subordinates. For the fact, however, that no inquiry was called for afterwards, that the true story of the operation and the opinions of Birdwood, White, Holmes, and Brand had no chance of reaching his ears, and that, in consequence, he and his staff remained utterly ignorant of the conduct of an important operation for which they were responsible, Haig must bear the blame.<sup>219</sup>

<sup>219</sup> The reference to this action in Haig's despatches (re-edited and annotated after the war by his private secretary, Lieutenant-Colonel J. H. Boraston) is almost ludicrously inaccurate. The attack is said to have been delivered at 4.30 by the 4th Australian and 62nd Divisions. "The Australian and West Riding battalions engaged showed great gallantry in executing a very difficult attack across a wide extent of open country. Considerable progress was made, and parties of Australian

With his many qualities of real greatness, his judgment of men was far from infallible, and, once his confidence had been gained, his trust was blind, not to say obstinate. To an old friend on his staff who, in a moment of confidence, at dinner, ventured to ask whether he was aware of the opinions concerning Gough that were widespread in the army, he curtly intimated that he wished to hear nothing on that subject. This trait had its element of nobility, but it resulted in his continuing to maintain with absolute confidence in high position a leader whose judgment, at least in this battle, had shown itself the plaything of an almost childish impetuosity.<sup>220</sup>

Throughout the 4th Australian Division the chief blame for the miscarriage was naturally laid on the tanks, and the bitterness against them was intense. The whole experiment had been based on a gross overestimate by their staff of their capabilities at the time. Not only were the machines slow and excessively liable to break down, but, according to Major Watson's admission, all his officers except two lacked both experience and skill, and most of their crews were inexperienced.<sup>221</sup> But, even if the staff of the tanks fully believed its plan justifiable, its preliminary arrangements were extraordinarily inefficient. After the total non-appearance of the tanks had caused the fiasco of April 10th and given ample warning of the risk of unpunctuality, the tanks were hopelessly late again on the 11th, not only at the starting point but at the rendezvous farther back. To crown all, the three which were on their proper alignment at "zero" were not—according to the statement of their own officer on the spot—capable of reaching the objective before the infantry,

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troops, preceded by tanks, penetrated the German positions as far as Riencourt-lez-Cagnicourt. The obstinacy of the enemy's resistance (to the Third Army), however, in Heninel and Wancourt . . . prevented the troops of the two Armies from joining hands, and the attacking troops of the Fifth Army were obliged to withdraw to their original line." It can almost be inferred that Haig believed Gough's operation to have been successful!

<sup>220</sup> Ludendorff's criticism of British leaders—that they pursued strategical aims without regard for the tactical difficulties—was never better illustrated than by Gough's leadership at Bullecourt. The criticism, however, would apply equally to his tactics at Mouquet Farm (see *Vol. III, p. 876*).

<sup>221</sup> Reports from Colonel Leane, Captain Jacka, the 62nd Division, and other sources afterwards indicated so plainly the defects of the tanks that General Gough's subsequent report to G.H.Q., dated April 30, stated: "Too great an emphasis cannot be placed on the fact that tanks are only an auxiliary arm, and the infantry must in no way rely upon them."

"In the attack on the 11th April, the tanks on this army front were not used with as much resolution as might have been possible, and, as the infantry had relied somewhat on the action of the tanks to help them through, the latter were consequently somewhat let down."



and none, in fact, did so reach it. The performance of several of the crews—in spite of the unnerving discovery that German machine-gun bullets were passing through the steel sides, and the extreme risk of conflagration—reached the highest standard of British devotion. That of others varied, naturally, in accordance with the grit or pluck of their members. The action of those who stopped and remained firing on their way to the wire was much criticised; but obviously all had much difficulty in seeing their way in the dark. A proportion were quite unfit for the task, became badly shaken, and undoubtedly failed to rise to the exacting expectations of the Australian infantry.

Nevertheless, the tanks did help the infantry in two ways. The panic which sent part of the German garrison fleeing across the countryside as the 4th Brigade entered O.G.1 was caused by their presence; and there is no question that the tanks attracted much of the attention which would otherwise have been concentrated on the infantry. They formed the chief target of the German artillery throughout the fight. When once, however, the infantry was “in,” it was the supposed movement of the tanks towards the inflated objectives that prevented the infantry from being protected by its own artillery, and delivered it helpless to the machine-guns and artillery of the enemy. It is therefore hardly to be wondered at that officers and men of the 4th Division vowed never again to rely upon tanks, an attitude which was generally maintained in the A.I.F. until 1918.

But the widespread criticism of the 62nd Division for not coming to the 4th Division's assistance has no fair ground. It is true that the 62nd Division had shortly after 8 o'clock been ordered to send battle patrols to the Hindenburg Line, and that at 10.30 General Birdwood, realising the desperate plight of his troops, appealed to the V Corps to attack. But the order at 8 o'clock was based on the definite assurance from I Anzac that no opposition had been met with in Bullecourt. The officers of the 62nd Division on the spot knew this to be untrue—except in the sense that no Australian soldier had been there. To have sent their unprotected infantry, without tanks, in broad daylight, over an approach as flat as a billiard table, against half-cut wire defended by a well warned enemy, in order to attempt a task which the

4th Australian Division had barely achieved by surprise in the breaking dawn would have been madness: three weeks later the commander<sup>222</sup> of an Australian brigade refused to undertake practically the same operation in support of some of his own troops. The plight of the 4th Division, however desperate, would not have been in any degree alleviated by the useless sacrifice of British soldiers.

There remains for the 4th Australian Division that honour which comes to a magnificent instrument recklessly shattered in the performance of an impracticable task—to an incomparable weapon, which, woefully mishandled and thrown at an impossible target, nevertheless by its sheer clean strength and elasticity cleaves its way deep into the apparently invulnerable side, and stays there until wrenched off by a power too strong for it. The action of the 4th Division at Bullecourt, if it served as a striking illustration of an attack that should never have been made, furnished also a classic example of success by determined infantry against insufficiently cut wire. The entanglement which faced both brigades was as intact and many times as deep as that confronting the 7th Brigade on the night of 29th July, 1916, at Pozières;<sup>223</sup> but leadership—superb by reason not merely of bravery and devotion, but of capacity—and the individual determination of the men carried the force through two such barriers, despite the heavy loss at each. Importance cannot always be attached to the phraseology of congratulatory messages, but the simple words of Birdwood, in forwarding Gough's appreciation of the "splendid effort" of the division, were true:

We have no cause to be disheartened at having failed to retain our footing. . . . Rather we can feel proud of the magnificent bravery displayed.

What might not these troops have achieved if prudently employed? One gain they secured, not without value—respect for themselves and their countrymen among all who knew the true story.

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<sup>222</sup> Brigadier General Gellibrand. (*See pp. 453-4.*)

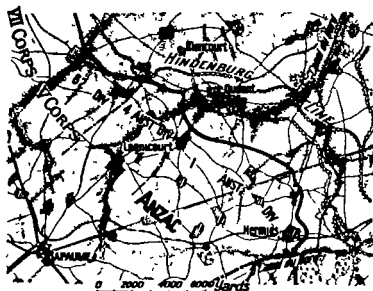
<sup>223</sup> The 7th Brigade, however, was under the great disadvantage of attacking in the dark.

## CHAPTER X

### LAGNICOURT—THE GERMAN COUNTER-STROKE

THE Fifth Army, as G.H.Q. had noted, was "weak." As the result of the policy with which Haig met the German withdrawal—that of saving at least as many divisions as the enemy saved—the Fifth Army had for some weeks maintained only three divisions to hold its front of 18,750 yards. Thus, in order to concentrate the force for striking at the Hindenburg Line on his left, Gough had entrusted the safety of his right and centre to a single division, the 1st Australian. On April 11th, when the 4th Australian Division for its attack on Bullecourt was concentrated on a 2,750 yards' front, and the 62nd Division on the left held about 4,000, the 1st Australian Division was responsible for over 12,000 yards, from a point south of Riencourt to the Canal du Nord opposite Havrincourt Wood—two-thirds of the front of the army.

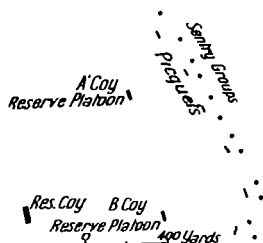
The extension of one division over so wide a sector in close proximity to the crucial front was only possible by reason of the enemy's withdrawal in that sector having barely ended. The Germans still maintained small outposts in front of their lines, and, though on its flanks the 1st Division was within 700–1,200 yards of the Hindenburg Line or its "balcony" trenches, in the centre, where these receded in a semicircle, the Australian outposts were still 2,700 yards away. In accordance with the British tactics throughout the advance, the division was disposed "in depth"—that is, with outposts in front and supports and reserves stationed in elaborate succession at wide intervals behind them—thus:



<i>Forward Line of Resistance.</i>						
Corps Reserve Line.	Corps Main Line.	Second Line.	Reserve.	Supports.	Front Line.	—
The old R.IIa, or Barbarossa line, just east of Bapaume, 5½-7 miles behind front (forward units of reserve division).	Practically the old German R.III, or Beugny-Ytres, line, 3-5 miles behind front (reserve brigade of forward division).	In front of line of villages of Morchies-Beaumetz, 1½-2 miles in rear of front (reserve battalion or battalions of forward brigade).	In sunken road, 1,000 yards back (reserve company—120 men—or companies of forward battalion).	Usually in a sunken road or old front-line post, 400-1,000 yards back (supporting platoon or platoons of forward company).	Small outpost trenches in front of the line of villages Lagnicourt-Boursies-Demicourt-Hermies (picquet-platoon of 15-20 men).	Line of sentry groups (section—N.C.O. and 6 or 7 men).

The rear lines of defence, except where they coincided with lines of old German wire or trench, were but partly complete, and only a fraction of the troops camped or billeted near them were specially allotted for their defence.<sup>1</sup> A very powerful resistance could nevertheless have been put up there. But the main function of the reserves was to support the troops in front of them.

To the enormous front held by the 1st Australian Division this system could be applied only if the outpost-line was reduced to the thinness of a light screen. With the division relying on two of its brigades to hold the line each with two battalions, each battalion holding its 3,000 yards sector with three companies,<sup>2</sup> and each company holding its post with three platoons, the front would be held, first by a line of sentry posts (4-7 men) 166 yards apart, whose duty would be to warn—and, if necessary, fall back upon—a line of picquets (15 to 20 men and, normally, a Lewis gun) 330 yards apart. Behind these, from a quarter to half-a-mile distant, would be the general line of the support platoons—one platoon to 1,000 yards. In addition, about a third of the sixty-four machine-guns of the division<sup>3</sup> were stationed, about three to a mile, beside, or a little in front of, the supports. From most of the front posts, which were unapproachable by day,<sup>4</sup> the neighbouring posts could be seen, if carefully looked for—a couple of steel helmets,<sup>5</sup> visible against a distant tuft of gorse, or a streak of newly-turned parapet appearing not unlike a small dam in the corner of a large paddock.<sup>6</sup> From the supports



<sup>1</sup> As it was obviously advisable to retain some definite garrison in the rear lines, it was eventually ordered that, if the reserves had to be sent forward, the particular companies allotted to the defence of the rear lines must remain. This provision, however, did not come into force until after the events which form the main subject of this chapter.

<sup>2</sup> Or their equivalent. The northernmost battalion (12th) had four companies in line, but each with two platoons in reserve.

<sup>3</sup> The British had now formed a machine-gun company (16 guns) for each division as well as for each brigade. The German establishment of heavy machine-guns was, roughly speaking, about the same.

<sup>4</sup> By day, in order to show that they were still there, the outposts of the 3rd Battalion used to hold up a rifle at stated times.

<sup>5</sup> Painted green or khaki, or, to deaden the "high lights," covered with hessian

<sup>6</sup> See Vol. XII, plate 309.

it was in many places impossible to detect the forward posts; a visiting officer could merely be shown their direction—"600 yards out there, to the right of those trees," "on the forward slope," "on those cross-roads." To hide the posts from the enemy, the earth from each little excavation was carefully smoothed out and covered with cut grass. Wire-entanglement had of late seldom, if ever, been erected in front of the posts, partly because, though favoured by headquarters, this step had not been specially ordered, and was hated by the troops as betraying their positions;<sup>7</sup> partly because no wire had been supplied, and the field companies and pioneers, which would ordinarily have been sent to supervise the work, were engaged in making roads and railways necessary for the Bullecourt offensive.<sup>8</sup> The supporting field artillery—that of the 5th Australian Division<sup>9</sup>—had two groups of guns on the left behind Morchies, so that one could help the Bullecourt attack,<sup>10</sup> and the third behind Hermies; but even had it been evenly distributed, with a front so extensive it could have provided only one field-gun or howitzer to each 170 yards.

The order of corps headquarters was that, if the enemy attacked, the picquet line must be held to the last; but it was obvious that so thin a line must be penetrated by any serious thrust, and could only be maintained by employing reserves to retake any part temporarily lost.<sup>11</sup>

It has been seen that the operations against the Hindenburg Line also necessitated that the right and centre groups of field

**The artillery thrust forward**      artillery supporting the division allotted for the attack should be thrust respectively far

<sup>7</sup> The danger to these small posts, if their position was indicated to the enemy, was a very real one. On March 31 General Holmes, in pursuance of his policy of personally reconnoitring each part of his line, visited one of them north of Lagnicourt. Accompanied by his aide-de-camp, Lieutenant K. A. Ferguson (of Sydney) and wearing, as usual, his staff cap with red band, he walked out by day to it. Though sniped at, he returned safely; but his aide-de-camp was hit and had to be left in the post, waiting until nightfall. Shortly afterwards, doubtless in consequence of all this movement, the post was shelled and hit, heavy casualties being caused to its garrison and Lieutenant Ferguson being wounded a second time.

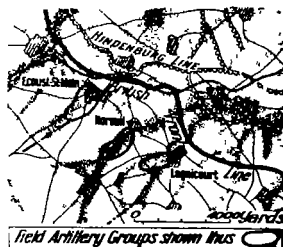
<sup>8</sup> The light railway, on which the 1st Division's pioneers were engaged, had now reached Frémicourt.

<sup>9</sup> Besides its own brigades (13th and 14th), the 5th Divisional Artillery had, temporarily attached, the 3rd (Army) Brigade, A.F.A., and the 106th Howitzer Battery. Each brigade formed a group.

<sup>10</sup> The 106th Battery belonged to this group. Some of the machine-guns of the 1st Division also were sited solely to help the Bullecourt operations.

<sup>11</sup> "I always impress upon every commander," Birdwood wrote, after April 15, "that I shall never say a word if small posts are overwhelmed by superior numbers, so long as they have arrangements ready for launching a counter-attack at once."

down the Lagnicourt and Noreuil valleys, which ran direct towards the enemy. The left group was emplaced mainly in sunken roads on the plateau behind Ecoust-Longatte, but was barely concealed; indeed, the 43rd Battery was so near the crest that its guns were ordered to avoid, if possible, firing by day. The Lagnicourt and Noreuil valleys being obvious channels of communication, were regularly shelled, but, soon after the guns opened there, those in the



Noreuil valley came under counter-battery fire such as Australian artillery had not yet experienced in the war.<sup>12</sup> The shelling of the Lagnicourt valley was less severe, but harassing. The lines of battery positions, one behind the other, down the depressions, were enfiladed, as were the roads by which the drivers brought ammunition. Moreover, a proportion of the enemy's 5.9-inch shells were now fitted with "instantaneous" fuses, which burst them before they penetrated, so that fragments skimmed the earth's surface almost with the speed of a bullet for 400-800 yards around.

The result was that the batteries in these valleys began to suffer a steady succession of casualties which, though comparatively few in daily total, were constant, the artillery's loss for the tour thus approaching that of the infantry. On April 7th 2 officers and 13 men were hit, mainly in Noreuil valley; on the 8th, an officer and 10 men, mostly behind Lagnicourt. On the 9th 11 men were killed and 19 wounded,<sup>13</sup> mostly near Lagnicourt. On the 10th 11 were killed, including the commander of the 4th Field Artillery Brigade, Lieutenant-Colonel Watts,<sup>14</sup> and his staff,<sup>15</sup> and 7 were wounded.

<sup>12</sup> The duels with the Turkish guns at Anzac had often been sharp, but the Turks had neither the guns nor the shells to maintain a constant bombardment.

<sup>13</sup> In the 4th Battery—in an orchard behind Lagnicourt—10 were killed and 6 wounded.

<sup>14</sup> Lieut.-Col. B. A. G. Watts, D.S.O. Commanded 4th A.F.A. Brigade, 1916/17 Officer of Australian Permanent Forces; of Sydney, b Adelaide, 5 March, 1880 Killed in action, 10 April, 1917.

<sup>15</sup> Captain B. H. Mack, A.A.M.C. (of Manly, N.S.W.), and Lieutenants H. G. Harding (of Brisbane) and G. K. Davenport (of Darling Point, N.S.W.).

Yet it was probably not until April 11th that the Germans accurately located even the Noreuil guns. That day, while the batteries were firing to cover the 4th Division's attempt upon the Hindenburg Line, a red-nosed German aeroplane, escaping the attention of the British airmen, flew low over Noreuil, and over the batteries crowded along the depression. At 4 o'clock, after the battle ended, the German artillery shelled the valley, and this day, although the loss of artillerymen was slighter, three guns were destroyed behind Noreuil and two behind Lagnicourt. With that day, according to the current banter of their infantry, the Australian artillery "entered the war." The valley slopes and the narrow flat behind Noreuil were thenceforth seldom free from intermittent shelling, the tawny slowly-unrolling cloud from the burst of a 5.9-inch shell becoming an almost permanent feature of the landscape.<sup>16</sup> From April 19th to the 23rd the valley was frequently fired at, sometimes heavily, with gas-shell.<sup>17</sup>

Meanwhile General Gough's energy was concentrated on preparation for another attack on the Hindenburg Line at Bullecourt. The 2nd Australian Division was brought forward for this and concentrated in the Noreuil sector, relieving the 4th on the night of April 13th. At the same time, in order to cause the enemy to apprehend a stroke farther east, the 1st Australian Division was to complete its approach to within 1,000 yards of the Hindenburg Line.

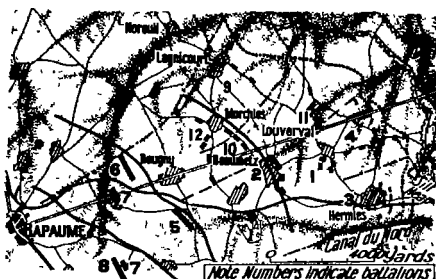
Accordingly on the night of April 13th the posts of the 1st Division, all along its enormous front, were thrust closer to the enemy. This movement to a depth of (in most parts) 1,000 yards brought the greater part of the small outposts to the edge of the slopes looking down on Mœuvres, Pronville, and Quéant, in the valleys of the Canal du Nord

<sup>16</sup> See Vol. XII, plates 314-5.

<sup>17</sup> The Germans fired on the night of April 20 3,000 shells, on April 21 1,000, and on April 22 700. The shells appear to have contained chlorine and phosgene. On the first of these occasions the casualties were fairly numerous. This was partly due to the fact that the medical personnel, working on some wounded, found it difficult to act efficiently in their gas masks, and accordingly pulled them down, merely keeping the mouthpiece between their teeth and attempting to breathe through it and not through the nose. This experiment was often tried, but was always risky.



and of the Agache, along which lay the "Balcony" Trench of the Hindenburg system. The night was dark, and the scattered companies reached their positions well before moonrise and spent the remaining hours digging their small trenches while the officer or N.C.O. went out and, in most cases, succeeded in locating and visiting the posts on either flank. At several points the advancing platoons came upon detachments of Germans who resisted. Above the canal, south-east of Hermies, a party of the 3rd Battalion was fired on by Germans in the square copse which it had been ordered to occupy. It failed to reach the position, and the sergeant in charge of the next post, who walked across to ascertain what men were digging in the wood, was mortally wounded. Farther north a post overlooking the Canal du Nord was fired on by machine-guns from a high silt heap bordering the channel, but silenced them with a Lewis gun and held on. On the other flank, near Pronville, a post of the 9th was thrust in between several similar positions of the enemy, one of which was captured.<sup>18</sup>



*Successive defence lines of 1st Division, morning of April 14. (The outpost-line is dotted.)*

But the only serious trouble occurred near the centre, where the 11th Battalion, in front of Louverval, had to advance its already extensive line down the wide open spur running into the re-entrant between the Agache and the Canal du Nord. In the dark two posts of the right and centre companies respectively went some way beyond the rest down the slope towards the Hindenburg Line. Their patrols could not find the posts on their flanks, nor could these find them. But at dawn they were seen to be attacked by Germans from the Hindenburg Line, to whom they were dangerously exposed. On receiving a message that both had been lost,

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<sup>18</sup> In getting round this German post, Lieutenant H. M. Shield (of Taringa Q'land) was killed.

Lieutenant-Colonel Rafferty,<sup>19</sup> commanding the 11th Battalion, ordered that they should be retaken. It was afterwards reported by him that this operation—obviously one of extreme difficulty, if not impossible, in daylight—had been carried out.

But, though given in good faith, this assurance appears to have been untrue. The attempt was indeed made by half the reserve company of the 11th, which at midday, under Major Dixon Header,<sup>20</sup> crossed the open plateau to the outpost-line, followed by German shells and directing the enemy's attention to the forward posts of the right company, among which this reinforcement eventually sought shelter. Of the two missing posts, one had been captured at day-break; but, unknown to the main force, the other (23 strong, under Lieutenant Stuart<sup>21</sup>) was still holding out.<sup>22</sup> It had beaten off four attacks before day-break, but a party of the enemy then slipped into a sunken road behind it. A messenger—Private E. Smith—attempting to go back was wounded, shot again, and killed. All day, Stuart and his men held on. At dusk, with their opponents now numbering several hundreds, their ammunition completely spent, five of their number killed, two badly wounded, and hope of support long since vanished, they surrendered.

The area of the 1st Australian Division being fan-shaped, this advance of April 13th-14th had increased the divisional frontage to 13,000 yards. This was held on the right, from the canal to beyond the Bapaume-Cambrai road, by the 3rd and 4th Battalions of the 1st Brigade; and on the left, from Louverval to the ridge between Lagnicourt and Noreuil, by the 11th and 9th Battalions of the 3rd Brigade. Early the next night—that of the 14th—the 12th Battalion marched forward to relieve the 9th. The brigade commander, General Bennett, rendered apprehensive by the capture of his two posts, decided to keep four companies from his reserve

<sup>19</sup> The same who, as a company officer of the 12th, fought at Fisherman's Hut and Tasmania Post (*see Vol. I, pp. 323-5; Vol. II, pp. 474-5*).

<sup>20</sup> Major D. Header, 11th Bn. Barrister-at-law; of Fremantle, W. Aust.; b. Carmarthen, Wales, 20 Sept., 1879.

<sup>21</sup> Lieut. J. E. A. Stuart, 11th Bn. Bank manager; of Perth, W. Aust., and Surrey Hills, Vic.; b. Wollongong, N.S.W., 24 June, 1875. Died 17 Jan., 1928.

<sup>22</sup> Stuart had with him Sergeant R. J. Camden (of Wokalup, W. Aust.).

battalions in closer support of his two forward battalions. Accordingly, two of the 10th were allotted as reserve to the 11th, and two of the 9th to the 12th. Moreover, the number of the posts in the hastily-sited line of the night before was to be increased, and, where possible, posts were to be wired, use being made of old German entanglements until the engineers had secured the necessary supply. It should be added that the two battalions holding the centre of the division's front—the 4th (1st Brigade) and 11th (3rd Brigade)—were not relying throughout upon the orthodox system of picqueting. The huge extent of front to be covered and the lie of the ground had caused some of their company commanders to distribute their foremost troops not in picquets protected by sentry groups, but either in picquets with sentry posts between, or in a line of small posts, each 6-12 men strong, 100-150 yards apart.<sup>23</sup> In the latter case the supporting platoons really formed the picquets, and were sometimes referred to by that name.

At dusk the straightening of the line and digging of extra posts began. On the right the 3rd Battalion duly occupied the square copse. In the centre Colonel Rafferty of the 11th, going round his line early in the night, was informed of the gap that existed in it,<sup>24</sup> and Major Hearder's reserve half-company was shifted northwards, but the posts formed by it were behind the left company, and, notwithstanding the belief of headquarters to the contrary, a space in the centre appears to have remained unfilled. These adjustments and the consequent digging continued throughout the night.

Towards dawn on April 15th the posts were levelling out the earth which they had dug and commencing to cover it with grass, when at several points movement was heard not far in front. At midnight an advanced post of the 4th Battalion under Sergeant Gaskill,<sup>25</sup> just south of the main road several

**First signs of counter-attack**

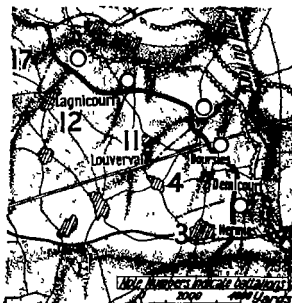
<sup>23</sup> The 11th partly adopted the former method, the 4th generally the latter.

<sup>24</sup> Through the capture of the two posts.

<sup>25</sup> Sgt. W. Gaskill (No. 1017; 4th Bn.). Police constable; of Burwood, N.S.W.; b. Leichhardt, N.S.W., 4 Jan., 1879. Killed in action, 15 April, 1917.

hundred yards beyond the eastern end of Boursies, had reported Germans moving in front, the glow of trench lights fixed to their tunics being easily visible.<sup>26</sup> A little before 4 a.m. the southern half of the line was put on the alert by a short sharp bombardment which fell about the old outpost line at Hermies<sup>27</sup> and Boursies, and on all the villages immediately in rear, from Beaumetz to Vaulx-Vraucourt, in or around which were brigade headquarters, and the artillery positions. A sentry of the 3rd Battalion in the post nearest to the "Silt Heap" sighted a body of Germans coming up the hill, and a warning was telephoned to company and battalion headquarters in Hermies. Farther north Germans were seen in movement ahead of the right and left companies of the 11th. Here, too, battalion headquarters was immediately warned; Lieutenant Lyon,<sup>28</sup> senior subaltern on the right, ordered his detachments to stop firing until the enemy could be clearly seen, and Captain O'Neill,<sup>29</sup> on the left, warned his posts.

A few minutes earlier, three and a half miles to the north-west, the sergeant in charge of the 2nd Australian Division's extreme right picquet of twelve men in the Hirondelle valley leading to Noreuil, walked across to the extreme left sentry group of the 12th Battalion (1st Division), under Corporal Hubble,<sup>30</sup> fifty yards away, and asked if he could hear men moving in front. The night had been even more tranquil than of late, except that for the first time for some days the German posts on this front had been throwing



*The circles show the points where Germans were first seen.*

<sup>26</sup> Lance-Corporal W. J. T. Owen (of Lavender Bay, N.S.W.), who was relieved at midnight, reported this to Captain H. E. Woodman of the 4th. It was also believed that a German patrol had slipped through to Boursies.

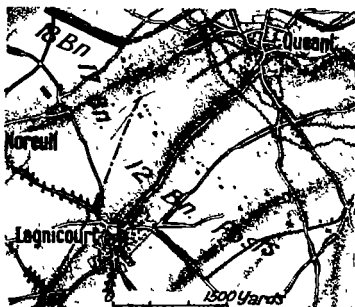
<sup>27</sup> It caught the 3rd Battalion's brass band, whose members had for the first time been ordered forward to carry rations to the front. The battalion is said to have gone without its breakfast.

<sup>28</sup> Lieut. P. W. Lyon, 11th Bn. Commercial traveller; of Claremont, W. Aust.; b. Korong Vale, Vic., 1885.

<sup>29</sup> Major J. P. O'Neill, M.C.; 11th Bn. Grocer and commercial traveller; of Kalgoorlie, W. Aust.; b. Longwood, Vic. 4 Sept., 1892.

<sup>30</sup> Sgt. A. J. Hubble, D.C.M. (No. 2620; 12th Bn.). Farm hand; of Wallumbilla, Q'land, b. Islington, London, Eng., 1894. Killed in action, 6 Oct., 1917.

flares. The two Australians walked to the top of a little rise and listened, but caught no sound; the sergeant thought he must have been mistaken. Soon afterwards, however, the sentry in Hubble's post said that a party was coming in from the right. A Tasmanian patrol was out,<sup>31</sup> and Hubble warned the man not to fire; but, as the oncoming party passed between his post and that of Lance-Corporal Peters<sup>32</sup> on his right, Hubble saw that they wore German helmets. He at once warned the sergeant of the 17th and Peters. Other figures were now seen advancing, and Hubble opened with his Lewis gun, but Germans continued to roll on in numbers until the small post, opening with hand grenades, caused those nearest to check. Peters' post and others of the 12th farther right were now firing, as was the picquet of the 17th on the left. But three other posts of the 17th beyond it on the farther slope of the Hironnelle valley were falling back. The Germans were now coming on in such numbers that Hubble decided to retire, and the picquet of the 17th followed and joined him.



The whole front of the 1st Division except its two right companies was being attacked, as was the right company of the 2nd Division. The posts had no flares for signalling to the artillery, but only on the left—where this flood of Germans silently overran the picquets before these had time to send messages—did the reserves and headquarters remain unwarned. Indeed, at all points except on the left and at one point in the centre, the front-line posts, opening rapid fire with rifles and Lewis guns, were able to stop the first advance. On the right of the front attacked, the picquet of the 3rd (N.S.W.) Battalion under Lieutenant Leslie<sup>33</sup> near the Silt

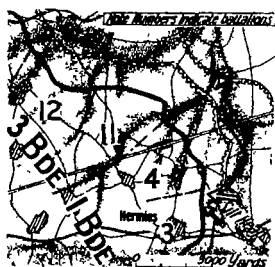
#### **Attack on 1st Brigade**

<sup>31</sup> A section of one of the reserve platoons had been sent up to go round the line of the company's posts.

<sup>32</sup> L/Cpl. W. Peters (No 2672; 12th Bn.). Hand driller; of Brisbane; b West Hartlepool, Durham, Eng., 1881. Killed in action, 15 April, 1917.

<sup>33</sup> Lieut G. H. Leslie, M.C. Aust. Flying Corps. Railway clerk, of Nowra, N.S.W., b. Sydney, 5 Dec., 1895.

Heap detected at 4.5 a body of Germans approaching up the hillside seventy yards away. The Lewis gun and rifles opened. At the same time some German detachment on the Silt Heap a few hundred yards behind the attacking Germans threw a flare against whose dazzling white halo their figures were perfectly defined. In front of Lieutenant Dill's<sup>84</sup> picquet, next to Leslie's, there stood outlined another party of oncoming Germans, and Lieutenant Boileau's<sup>85</sup> picquet (the left of the 3rd Battalion) sighted a third climbing the Havrincourt-Demicourt road. The company on Leslie's right also detected some thirty figures crossing its front. Its Lewis gun fired, the party ran back over the slope, and the Lewis gun thenceforth directed its fire across the front of the picquets farther north. Here the Germans on the Silt Heap, throwing a flare every few minutes, brightly illuminated for the Australians the attacking waves. Nevertheless these bravely persisted against Dill's and Leslie's posts, one of whose Lewis guns fired 900 rounds<sup>86</sup> without jamming. It was only by opening with bombs that Dill's picquet caused its opponents to break back to the edge of the slope where they thenceforth tried to dig in. The Germans attacking Leslie were driven off after crawling to within twenty yards.<sup>87</sup> At



The arrows show direction of attack on 3rd Bn.

<sup>84</sup> Lieut. H. L. Dill, M.C.; 3rd Bn. Grazier; of Brewarrina district, N.S.W.; b Hay, N.S.W., 4 Aug., 1896. Died 29 June, 1923.

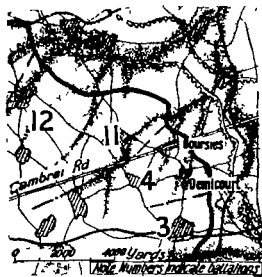
<sup>85</sup> Lieut. A. H. Boileau, M.C.; Aust. Flying Corps. Shipping clerk; of Sydney; b. Grenfell, N.S.W., 29 Jan., 1895.

<sup>86</sup> That is, twenty drums.

<sup>87</sup> Several Germans attempting to get behind the picquets were killed slightly in rear of the line, and one reached the edge of Leslie's trench before being killed. It took Leslie's picquet an hour's fighting with bombs, rifle-grenades, and continuous fire to beat back its opponents who at dawn tried to dig in behind a rise close to the right front. From this cover they were routed by a rifle-grenade, and fled unharmed, a fit of laughter at their disturbance paralysing Leslie's post. The artillery, informed by battalion head-quarters, had laid down at 4.15 its S.O.S. barrage in front of the picquets, but its guns were few and their shell-supply short. At dawn the position was not free from anxiety, the picquets having nearly exhausted their ammunition. Leslie, however, had a telephone line to his company head-quarters, and, though cut at 4.15, this was repaired by 4.45, enabling him to ask for ammunition. Runners were sent out hung over with many "slings" (cotton bandoliers) of ammunition, and by crawling they reached the picquets. Although one of these men made the journey three times, Leslie's post was again short of ammunition when, at dawn, the attack here ceased.

day-break the enemy's attempts here finally ceased. The ground was sprinkled with German dead, but the 3rd Battalion had lost only a dozen men killed or wounded, all by rifle-fire.<sup>38</sup>

Thus the picquet line of the 3rd Battalion was nowhere pierced. The posts of the 4th (New South Wales), north of the 3rd, half-a-mile or more in front of Demicourt and Boursies, also beat off the Germans at the first approach. The struggle which here followed, however, was tougher, since the line lay across four swellings of the ground, and the enemy could take advantage of the intervening depressions. Owing doubtless to the difficulty of covering nearly 4,000 yards of undulating ground, each of the three forward companies of the 4th was holding its front with a line of from three to six small posts, but each also held in support two platoons, stationed either in sunken roads or in "strong-points" of the older front line. Everywhere the Germans, after being sent to ground by sharp Lewis gun fire,<sup>39</sup> made repeated attempts to reach the posts by rushes.<sup>40</sup> At almost all points these were beaten off three or four times, but in the valleys, where the Germans had partial shelter and could bring up their supports, they quickly made headway.



<sup>38</sup> The Germans after daybreak began to collect their wounded, the stretcher-bearers coming out with Red Cross flags. The New South Welshmen permitted this, and sent back their own wounded. It was presently observed, however, that the German troops behind the stretcher-bearers were digging in, a hundred yards or so from the Australian posts. Moreover, two men were observed carrying a stretcher on which was some object not resembling a man. Suspecting that it was a machine-gun (whether being salvaged or established), the Australians, after having vainly tried to wave the Germans away, opened fire. A sharp reply at once came from the two German machine-guns on the Silt Heap, which looked into Lieutenant Dill's post. Dill and three of his N.C.O's were immediately wounded, and the German stretcher-bearers under this barrage completed their task without further interference. On these additional casualties being reported to headquarters by a returning ammunition carrier, Lieutenant C. L. Smith (of Newtown, N.S.W., killed in action on 24 June, 1918) and several water- and ammunition-carriers reinforced the post, reaching it by crawling for the last 200 yards. At dusk this post was shifted.

<sup>39</sup> The telephone wires to battalion headquarters were cut by shell-fire before the infantry had seen the enemy's actual advance. But in this sector the German bombardment had given warning, and the battalion's reserves were made ready.

<sup>40</sup> When the main effort flagged, some exceedingly bold efforts were made by individual Germans. One, who attempted to bomb a post single-handed, was quickly riddled with bullets. Another, who attacked alone, succeeded in getting away under a storm of rifle-fire.

In the southernmost depression one small post was captured<sup>41</sup> and the Germans, after occupying it, tried to get in behind the southern company of the 4th.<sup>42</sup> The supports, however, in a sunken road and strong-point only slightly in rear stopped the advance, and, although a reserve platoon of the southern company, sent to counter-attack, suffered sharp loss, the Germans in that valley were held 1,000 yards east of Demicourt.

The next two posts to the north, on a slight ridge, held their ground throughout,<sup>43</sup> but north of them was another valley up which the Germans from the main Cambrai road constantly attempted to stream. A couple of small posts, and those higher on the slopes, stopped this enemy, but their ammunition ran low, and when, after the fourth attempt, the Germans were again seen coming on 200 yards away, five or six newly-arrived reinforcements in Corporal Chauncy's<sup>44</sup> post could not be induced to stand any longer and fled to the rear. The second post also retired, but Chauncy ran across to Lieutenant Hooper's<sup>45</sup> post, 11 strong on his right. This fought until its Lewis gun had been put out of action, several of its men hit, and its ammunition spent, when, with the Germans in its rear, it surrendered. Several bodies of the enemy now attempted to push up this valley to the rear of Demicourt, but the supporting platoon, firing at 800 yards, was able to stop them. A neighbouring machine-gun of the 1st Company fired 4,000 rounds at ranges of 300-700 yards. A platoon of the reserve company was early sent to strengthen these supports and, soon afterwards, the leading company of the 1st Battalion from Doignies was despatched thither as reserve.

On the next height to the north ran the main Cambrai road, through Boursies, and north-west of this again was the deep forked gully leading down to Mœuvres (a village behind the Hindenburg Line). Up this valley the Germans

<sup>41</sup> It was reported that this post had been taken by means of a *flammenwerfer*.

<sup>42</sup> At a critical moment a Lewis gun of this company jammed. The gunner, Corporal A. P. Newson (of Whitton, N.S.W.), however, coolly set his gun in order and then, standing up with it at the shoulder, fired into the enemy. Later, while sniping, he was mortally wounded.

<sup>43</sup> The post on their left retired on them.

<sup>44</sup> Cpl. P. H. Chauncy (No. 1736; 4th Bn.). Farmer; of Ganmain district, N.S.W.; b. Cootamundra, N.S.W., 8 Aug., 1886.

<sup>45</sup> Lieut. C. W. Hooper, 4th Bn. Bank clerk; of Wingham, N.S.W.; b. Deniliquin, N.S.W., 10 Oct., 1894.



penetrated in force, getting between—and also past the left flank of—the 4th Battalion's outposts whose fire could not stop them. The few small detachments on the high ground in front of Boursies were thus placed in an almost hopeless position, attacked in front and on both flanks. In one the Lewis gun soon jammed, and the party then fell back on the sunken road on the north-eastern edge of Boursies. Sergeant Gaskill's post<sup>46</sup> (reinforced by a ration party of seven under Sergeant Atkinson<sup>47</sup>) was bombed by Germans who managed to creep up in the dark, and its corporal killed.<sup>48</sup> With bombs it beat them off. At day-break the attacking waves became visible, and with Lewis gun and rifles the post twice drove them back and for some time held them at a distance. Its last cartridge had just been fired when a private, P. J. Burke,<sup>49</sup> who had been relieved there earlier in the night and knew that ammunition must be short, arrived with a case of it. He was killed as he reached the trench, but with this supply the post held on. A sudden cessation of fire, however, showed that other posts had run short all along the sector. A German sniper, creeping along the Cambrai road and shooting from behind one of the trees in its avenue, enfiladed the trench. One man after another was thus killed. Ammunition again ran short, and messengers sent to inform headquarters were shot down. Sergeant Gaskill, himself attempting to make the journey, was killed, and eventually the post, its ammunition finished and the Germans now in its rear, surrendered.

The resistance of these men and others, however, had given time for the local company commander, Captain Woodman<sup>50</sup>—and, when he was wounded, Lieutenant



*The arrow shows the German attack on left of 4th Bn.*

<sup>46</sup> See p. 363.

<sup>47</sup> Sgt. L. C. Atkinson (No 282; 4th Bn.). Grazier; of Mudgee, N.S.W., b. Mudgee, 22 Oct., 1892.

<sup>48</sup> L/Cpl. T. F. Oswald (No 3876; 4th Bn.). Police constable, of Glen Innes, N.S.W.; b. Casterton, Vic., 1887. Killed in action, 15 April, 1917.

<sup>49</sup> Pte. P. J. Burke (No. 1325; 4th Bn.). Draper, of Sydney, b. Clonlara, Co. Clare, Ireland, 19 April, 1892. Killed in action, 15 April, 1917.

<sup>50</sup> Lieut.-Col. H. E. Woodman, D.S.O.; 4th Bn. Builder; of Dungog, N.S.W.; b. Gawler, S. Aust., 21 Sept., 1895.

Macalpine<sup>51</sup>—to take the necessary precautions for holding Boursies. First, Woodman attempted to recapture his two northernmost outposts, himself leading 20 men against one, and sending Macalpine with 20 against the other. Woodman was immediately met by strong fire, which wounded him and drove back his men. Macalpine's effort also was foiled by Germans appearing in his rear. He accordingly sent a strong patrol under Lieutenant Agnew<sup>52</sup> along the main road to strengthen a second-line post beside a small chapel 200 yards east of Boursies, with orders to resist to the last, while he himself held the sunken roads north-east and south-east of the village, guarding the flanks. The three remaining platoons of the reserve company were sent to prolong the flank along the northern edge of the village, which was closely attacked. A machine-gun of the 1st Company here fired 5,000 rounds into the Germans, some of them only sixty yards away.

But it was the chapel post which bore the brunt, and it held out stubbornly.<sup>53</sup> Close on the north the Germans broke through the posts of the 11th Battalion and Major Sasse, in charge of the forward line of the 4th, reported the situation to be very serious. He was at once strengthened by three companies of the 1st Battalion, sent up under Major Woodforde,<sup>54</sup> these reserves being replaced by two companies of the 2nd. With these reinforcements the 1st Brigade's line appeared safe; the attack on the 4th Battalion was being held, without much difficulty except at the chapel, by the front-line supports; and at 8.30 Brigadier-General Lesslie took the wise and generous step of sending the two other companies of the 2nd, his last reserve, to assist the 3rd Brigade, which was being more severely pressed.

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<sup>51</sup> Capt. R. A. Macalpine, M.C.; 4th Bn. Warehouse clerk; of Mosman, N.S.W.; b. Mosman, 1891.

<sup>52</sup> Lieut. L. L. Agnew, M.C.; 4th Bn. Pastoralist; of Oatlands, Tas.; b. Oatlands, 28 Aug., 1890.

<sup>53</sup> Among others, Lieutenant Agnew was wounded. He lay in the open almost within bomb range of the enemy. Two stretcher-bearers tried to reach him, but one was killed and the other wounded. Private W. Swanney (of Sydney and Orkney Is; died on 17 Nov., 1926), however, crawled out and brought Agnew in, the Germans, when they saw his purpose, withholding their fire.

<sup>54</sup> Major P. S. S. Woodforde, 1st Bn. Woolbuyer; of Mosman, N.S.W.; b. Dubbo, N.S.W., 12 Jan., 1894. Died of wounds, 6 May, 1917 [Woodforde, senior major of the 1st Battalion (Lieutenant-Colonel Stacy), was eventually given charge of this part of the forward line; Major Sasse—the same who had fought at Sasse's Sap in Gallipoli—now senior major of the 4th (Lieutenant-Colonel Mackay), had general charge of the forward line of the 4th.]

It has already been mentioned that the posts of the 3rd Brigade's right battalion, the 11th (Western Australia), though thrust far forward on the wide spur running out from the Anzac centre, had been able to send to headquarters a hurried warning before they were at grips with the oncoming enemy. Two picquets<sup>55</sup> of the left company (Captain O'Neill) were behind some lengths of old German entanglement, and their sentry groups, stationed on the far side of the wire, had brought in the news: "There are men moving down there." The Germans here used no flares, but could nevertheless be dimly seen. One actually reached an Australian trench, but they were eventually driven by fire to the edge of the slope, although several snipers nested themselves close to the wire. The Western Australians were supplied with fresh ammunition by batmen and others from company headquarters, who crawled forward with bandoliers slung round them, and the enemy on this flank made no progress.

The posts of the right-flank company (Captain Hemingway<sup>56</sup>) also, though not protected with wire, kept back the enemy in their front. The right post of this company had not, on the previous night, reached its intended position, having been opposed by the enemy in the gully leading to Mœuvres. Its officer had been shot and the picquet remained far short of the general alignment and overlooking the branch of the gully, which separated the flank of the 11th from that of the 4th. The posts ahead checked the enemy by well controlled fire, Lieutenant Pope<sup>57</sup> down the valley holding his men



*The arrow shows the attack on Pope's post.*

<sup>55</sup> This company held its front in the orthodox fashion, the picquets being under Lieutenant R. Hall (of Perth, W. Aust.) and Sergeant H. Cartwright (of Woodville, Kojonup, W. Aust.) respectively.

<sup>56</sup> Capt R. Hemingway, M.C.; 11th Bn. Bank manager, of Albany, W. Aust.; b Albany, 7 Feb., 1889.

<sup>57</sup> Lieut C. Pope, V.C.; 11th Bn. Insurance agent, of Perth, W. Aust.; b Mile End, London, 5 March, 1883. Killed in action, 15 April, 1917.

quiet whenever the Germans went to ground, and firing only when they got up to rush, and Lieutenants Lyon and Beattie<sup>58</sup> doing much the same higher up the slope.

But a large body of Germans, winding up the creek bed in the dark, had already passed between Pope and the next sentry post (under Corporal Arundel<sup>59</sup>) without either being aware of it, and had come out on the summit several hundred yards in Pope's rear. Most of this body was beaten back to the edge of the gully by the fire of machine-guns and of the supports under Captain Hemingway;<sup>60</sup> but part of it reached and occupied a short section of an old trench 700 yards behind Lyon and close in front of the supports. Neither Pope nor Lyon could see this movement, the night being too dark, but from shouts, heard on all sides, Pope concluded that the enemy was round him. He nevertheless held on and sent for ammunition. The messenger, Private Gledhill,<sup>61</sup> had gone 100 yards when he almost ran into the backs of a line of Germans edging the gully. By making a *détour* he escaped their notice until far enough away to risk their fire. He next ran into two Germans "who did not interfere with me nor I with them," and then stumbled on a German lying down. "He stood up and put up his hands," said Gledhill afterwards. "I swore at him and passed on." Gledhill reached company headquarters, and Captain Hemingway at once sent Pope an N.C.O. and 15 men with ammunition. But day was now breaking, and this party found its way barred by 50 Germans on its right front and another 50 to its left. It accordingly returned to Hemingway.

The other posts and their sentry groups were in the same situation as Pope's. A messenger<sup>62</sup> sent by Lyon for ammunition, on reaching a sunken road in rear was hit on

<sup>58</sup> Lieut. R. Beattie, M.C.; 11th Bn. Mill hand; of East Kirup, W. Aust.; b. Gorebridge, Midlothian, Scotland, 1887.

<sup>59</sup> C.Q.M.S. R. Arundel, D.C.M. (No. 4441; 11th Bn.). Farmer; of Cranbrook, W. Aust.; b. Beechworth, Vic., 1875.

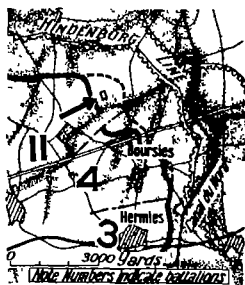
<sup>60</sup> The right flank picquet, whose position was much exposed when the enemy penetrated the line of the 4th, fell back on Hemingway; but Corporal Arundel's sentry group in the valley remained, although surrounded. Whenever the Germans attempted to approach it, which they did several times, the post gave them rapid fire, and they desisted. At dusk, as the Germans were still behind them, Arundel, avoiding them, brought his men in.

<sup>61</sup> Cpl. A. G. Gledhill (No. 3797; 11th Bn.). Farmer; of Nangeenan, W. Aust.; b. St. Arnaud, Vic., 16 June, 1892.

<sup>62</sup> Pte. W. Cranston (No. 6497; 11th Bn.). Stoker; of Subiaco, W. Aust.; b. Shotts, Scotland, 1897.

the head by a rifle-butt and found himself a prisoner.<sup>63</sup> Lieutenant Simmons,<sup>64</sup> commanding a post of the centre company, was shot through the head from the rear. Sergeant Plunkett, in charge of another post, was also killed. The enemy had got through the gaps. The gallant Pope was shot dead,<sup>65</sup> his last order being to "hang on."<sup>66</sup> Lyon, himself using revolver and rifle, ordered his picquets to fight to their last shot and then destroy their Lewis guns. Though these posts themselves were just out of sight, observers in the supports could see the bursts of their bombs and rifle-grenades and hear the firing until some hours after day-break. Shortly afterwards those in rear realised by a sudden silence that these positions had been captured.

Their tough resistance, however, had enabled a rough line to be formed farther back connecting the supports. To this were brought up shortly after day-break, the two supporting companies of the 10th (South Australia). Two of their platoons, under Lieutenants Dougall<sup>67</sup> and Wendt,<sup>68</sup> were at once used by Hemingway for dislodging the party of the enemy which had nested itself in the old trench in his front, the attempt being covered by a Lewis gun from the flank. The Germans immediately retired, some surrendering, others running back to the rim of the hill formerly held by the Australian posts. There and in the gullies, for the time being, they held on. The support line of the 11th and its immediate reserves had repelled the attack without overstrain.



The arrow shows the attack led by Lieuts. Dougall and Wendt.

<sup>63</sup> Another man, Private W. Pierce (of Perth, W. Aust.), who volunteered to bring ammunition, managed to return with it to his post, though wounded.

<sup>64</sup> Lieut. E. D. Simmons, 11th Bn. Accountant; of Perth, W. Aust., b. Wollongong, N.S.W., 6 March, 1892. Killed in action, 15 April, 1917.

<sup>65</sup> For his brave defence Pope, an ex-member of the London police who had settled in Western Australia, was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross.

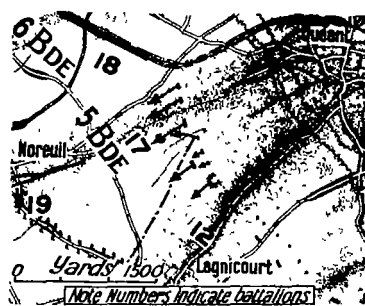
<sup>66</sup> His corporal, C. J. Godfrey (of Perth, W. Aust.), was wounded. Lance-Corporal H. L. Polain (of Subiaco, W. Aust.), commanding a small post of the right company, was killed. Sergeant H. P. Walker (of Beverley, W. Aust.), attempting to get ammunition for another post, was wounded.

<sup>67</sup> Lieut. N. Dougall, M.C.; 10th Bn. Warehouseman; of Turramurra, N.S.W.; b. Melbourne, 1887. Killed in action, 6 May, 1917.

<sup>68</sup> Lieut. K. K. Wendt, 10th Bn. Student, of St. Peters, S. Aust., b. St. Peters, 17 July, 1898. Killed in action, 6 May, 1917.

In the northernmost subsector of the 1st Division, the 12th Battalion (Tasmania, etc.) was not directly assailed on its right, and this portion of the battalion knew nothing of the progress of events until after day-break, when it sighted the enemy far to its left rear, engaged with the neighbouring companies about Lagnicourt. Its posts then fell back on their supports, and were set to dig facing the left rear.

It was against the left company of the 12th and the right company of the 17th (2nd Division) that the blow had fallen most heavily. At their point of junction, a mile north of Lagnicourt, the outposts, as related earlier in this chapter, had found the Germans streaming silently through them in the dark, and, after about twenty minutes' resistance, had tried to fall back in an orderly manner upon their supports. The attack, however, was much too strong to permit of this retirement being successfully carried out. The enemy who had already passed was much more numerous than the withdrawing troops. The two flank-posts under Corporal Hubble of the 12th and the sergeant of the 17th, who had joined forces in falling back, eventually stumbled on to the back of a line of Germans who were lying down, firing at some Australian supports. These Germans and the retiring Australians were not separated by a dozen yards when they saw each other. The Germans jumped up and there followed a fight to the death in which few of either party escaped. Hubble, with Private Keogh<sup>69</sup> (one of his Lewis gun team<sup>70</sup>) and two men of the 17th, succeeded in getting through, and wandered into a



The arrows show the withdrawal of the posts.

<sup>69</sup> Pte. G. Keogh (No. 1132; 12th Bn.). Labourer; of Penguin, Tas., b. Penguin, 6 Oct., 1894.

<sup>70</sup> Other members of the team were Privates G. J. McGrath, A. Wilson, and B. B. Pretty. (McGrath belonged to Goodna, Q'land; Wilson to Williamstown, S. Aust.; Pretty to Launceston, Tas.)

sunken road south of Noreuil, where they found the support battalion (19th) of the 5th Brigade, and informed it that the Germans had broken through.

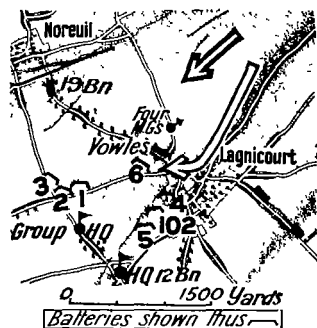
The picquets of the 12th next to this sentry group were in the same case. When it was clear that the crowds of Germans sweeping past could not be held, Lieutenant Harrison gave the order to withdraw on the supports—which here were over three-quarters of a mile in rear. But the enemy were then all round, and the small detachments of Tasmanians retiring among them were partly shot down, partly scattered, so that only by chance in the dark did remnants get through, and with them came the enemy. Lieutenant Harrison himself was mortally wounded, and many of his men captured. Four machine-guns of the 3rd Company, in scattered positions between the outposts and the supports, were attacked almost before the gunners could distinguish friend from foe. One was captured. A second, though the enemy was all round its position, was withdrawn by Lance-Corporal Schocher,<sup>71</sup> who, with one member of his crew, fought his way back by stages to the next company on the right. The other two held out, supported by parties of infantry who fell back upon them.<sup>72</sup>

In these circumstances the supports of the left company of the 12th—a platoon and a section, bivouacked in the sunken Lagnicourt-Noreuil road with their experienced company commander, Captain Vowles—had little chance of stemming the advance. There had been no local bombardment, and it was not until some time after the attack on the outposts had begun that Vowles was awakened by his company sergeant-major with the news that the Germans had broken through. He telephoned it to battalion headquarters, which lay to the south-west of Lagnicourt. Some fugitives came in, and then Vowles saw the Germans advancing in extended order up the spur between Lagnicourt and Noreuil, across which the sunken road ran. His Lewis gunners drove them back to shelter, but almost immediately others were discovered

<sup>71</sup> Cpl John Martin Schocher, M.M. (No. 2206; 3rd M.G. Coy.). Iron turner, of Kalgoorlie, W. Aust., b. Bendigo, Vic., 1891. His companion was Pte. R. Barber, M.M. (of Fremantle, W. Aust.).

<sup>72</sup> Lieutenant Dadson, 12th Bn., commanding one of the parties, refused to retire, though ordered to do so by another officer.

approaching from Lagnicourt to the right rear, and a machine-gun opened from that direction. On Vowles's left front, in another road slightly in advance of that which he occupied, was a section (four guns) of the 21st Machine Gun Company,<sup>73</sup> stationed there temporarily to support the Bullecourt attack, but under warning to be moved to a more useful position. One gun lay packed, ready for moving; the others had hardly had time to open when some of the enemy from Lagnicourt appeared close in their rear. There was a short bomb fight.<sup>74</sup> A gunner, Private Erbacher,<sup>75</sup> by swinging his gun round and firing into the Germans only fifteen yards in rear, drove them back, dismantled his gun, and, with a few others,<sup>76</sup> managed to get through them; but in a tight corner the gun had to be left hidden in a shell-hole, and was not recovered. The Germans, after overwhelming these machine-gunners, passed on and attacked Vowles, and at the same time others appeared from the direction of Lagnicourt, cutting him off from his battalion headquarters. He afterwards said that he had no S.O.S. flares or rockets, and that the company commander of the 9th whom he had relieved the previous evening had told him that no supply was available.<sup>77</sup> The line of the enemy in front was creeping close. Accordingly, at about 4.30, to avoid being surrounded and destroyed, he gave the word to withdraw up the valley towards Vaulx-Vraucourt, where were some reserves of the 2nd Division.



<sup>73</sup> The newly-formed divisional company of the 1st Australian Division.

<sup>74</sup> Sergeant E. L. M. Facer (of Cunnamulla, Q'land), who used his revolver and threw several bombs, was captured. Seventeen months later, with a loyal comrade, Private J. Cooper (of West Bromwich, Staffs, Eng.) of the Coldstream Guards, he succeeded in escaping from Germany to Holland.

<sup>75</sup> Sgt. L. P. Erbacher, M.M. (No. 325; 21st M.G. Coy.). Plumber; of Toowoomba, Q'land; b. Toowoomba, 19 Sept., 1897.

<sup>76</sup> Lieutenant N. Martin (of Charters Towers, Q'land, killed in action on 29 Oct., 1917) and seven men.

<sup>77</sup> There was some muddle here. In an inquiry later the subaltern of the 9th Battalion who handed over to Vowles's company stated that a set of S.O.S. rockets and sticks was duly passed on by him to the relieving officer.



Unfortunately, within a square quarter of a mile behind Vowles's position, there lay, in the valley leading to Lagnicourt, the foremost brigade of the 1st Australian Division's artillery, which formed one of the three groups of Australian field artillery thrust forward for the Bullecourt bombardment; a quarter of a mile away farther up the same depression lay another brigade, and group headquarters. Vowles, who only took over the position after dark, had received no orders to furnish an escort for this group or to alarm it in case of attack, although the 6th Battery was close on his right rear, 150 yards behind the road. At 4.30 a sentry of this battery woke its commander, Major Dodd, and told him that heavy fire had broken out at Vowles's position on the spur to their left, and that German flares were being fired from the road immediately ahead of the battery. Some of these lights were falling almost among the guns. A bombardier, L. Kaiser,<sup>78</sup> walking forward to investigate, was met by a German who threw a bomb. Kaiser shot him, but the position of the battery was one of extreme peril and difficulty. It could not open fire, not knowing what bodies of its own troops might be close in front. Neither could it organise its own defence, since at this time, through shortage of small arms, only ten rifles were provided for each battery, and of these the artillery of the 1st Division—through careless over-confidence—had left all except one per battery at their waggon lines, far back near Bapaume.<sup>79</sup> The threatened batteries were thus literally defenceless, but in this situation of intense anxiety there arrived from the rear an order which determined their action.

Although the German attack in this part had been launched without bombardment the enemy's guns opened later to cover it, and these shells had awakened the Australian staffs at the headquarters around which they fell. About 4.30 Lieutenant-Colonel Stevenson, commanding the group in the Lagnicourt valley, rang up his batteries, which replied that a few shells were falling, but not close to them. Shortly afterwards, however, the rattle of musketry was heard in the direction of

<sup>78</sup> Sgt. L. Kaiser, D.C.M., M.M. (No. 1250; 6th Bty., A.F.A.). Vigneron; of Ivanhoe, Vic.; b. Port Melbourne, 28 June, 1893.

<sup>79</sup> At Favreuil and other villages. On May 4 by order of the Commander-in-Chief the number of rifles to be allotted to each British battery was increased to thirty-six.

Lagnicourt, and Stevenson, ringing up the 5th Battery, close behind Lagnicourt, found its commander, Major Riggall,<sup>80</sup> ringing him. Riggall said that the infantry had been retiring between his guns, which were now under sharp rifle-fire from the enemy. He was in great difficulty as to what to do. Stevenson told him to load his guns, set the fuses at zero, and open fire on the Germans if he could see them, but also to be ready to take out breech blocks and abandon his guns if ordered to do so. Stevenson then telephoned to the commander of the artillery massed under the 2nd Division, General Rosenthal, who agreed that the best course was for the gun crews to withdraw their breech blocks and dial sights and retire.

It was then nearly 5 o'clock,<sup>81</sup> and still dark. The 6th Battery had its guns laid on the spur where Vowles had been fighting, but could not distinguish the Germans from the Tasmanians, small parties of whom were still falling back through the gun-positions. Lieutenant Johnson<sup>82</sup> of the 21st Machine Gun Company has just come in and informed Major Dodd of the Germans approaching from the front when they also began to arrive unexpectedly from Lagnicourt, which, as the batteries were all turned towards Riencourt, lay on their right flank and rear. At 5.10 Major Biddle of the 4th Battery, in an orchard of the village, telephoned to Colonel Stevenson that hand-grenades were falling around his guns. Dropping the telephone for a moment, Stevenson looked down the valley and saw signs of fighting in bewildering diversity, all round the position of the batteries. He immediately gave the order to retire. Just as the men of the 6th Battery withdrew, the machine-gun officer, Johnson, who had warned them, saw a machine-gun open some distance in front. Believing that it might be one of his own, he immediately returned towards it, stumbled into a number of Germans, and was made prisoner.<sup>83</sup> Seven artillerymen of the two rear-most batteries also were captured by Germans, who had already cut them off.

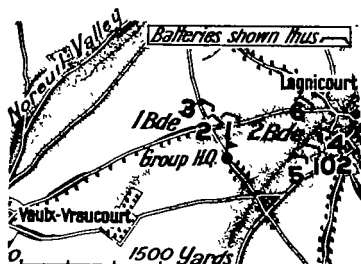
<sup>80</sup> Lieut.-Col. H. W. Riggall, C.M.G., D.S.O., V.D. Commanded 5th A.F.A. Bde., 1918/19. Solicitor; of Toorak, Vic.; b. Windsor, Vic., 24 Jan., 1882. Died 11 Jan., 1930.

<sup>81</sup> That is, by "summer" time. The true time was 4 a.m.

<sup>82</sup> Lieut. H. Johnson, M.C., 21st M.G. Coy. Bank clerk, of Stanthorpe, Q'land; b. Southport, Q'land, 1893.

<sup>83</sup> In November 1917 this gallant officer (like Sergeant Facer of the same company) escaped from Germany into Holland.

The guns of all four batteries of the 2nd Brigade were thus abandoned, and shortly afterwards, as the enemy appeared likely to reach the three batteries of the 1st Brigade<sup>84</sup> farther back, these, being equally lacking in protection, were ordered to take the same step, and group headquarters also withdrew. Partly through the dark and the natural excitement, partly through known weakness in a battery command, which should long before have been remedied, the withdrawal was accompanied by signs of panic, one party, at least, tumbling into the infantry bivouacs and artillery headquarters<sup>85</sup> near Vaulx-Vraucourt in a manner which might have spread alarm among overstrained troops. Fortunately those among whom they came were without "nerves."



The narrative must now turn to the two flanks of the breach made by the Germans, and, first, to the right company of the 2nd Division which had been torn apart from its neighbour of the 1st Division by the flood of Germans in and east of the Hirondelle valley.<sup>86</sup> This company, the right of the 17th (N.S.W.) Battalion, though heavily pressed, had been able to fall back in better order than the left of the 12th. About twenty minutes after the first shots Lieutenant Shield,<sup>87</sup> seeing that the enemy's numbers were obviously overwhelming, had ordered the picquets to fall back on the supports which were with Captain Sheppard,<sup>88</sup> the company commander, in a

<sup>84</sup> The 1st, 2nd, and 3rd. Its howitzer battery (the 101st) was in the next valley, behind Noreuil.

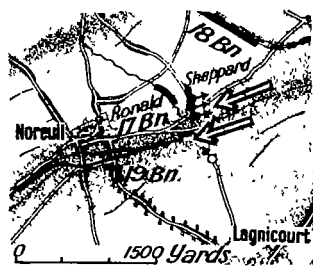
<sup>85</sup> Those of Colonel Rabett of the central group of artillery

<sup>86</sup> These evidently issued from Quéant.

<sup>87</sup> Lieut. R. V. Shield, M.C.; 17th Bn. University student; of Petersham, N.S.W.; b. Bathurst, N.S.W., 1 Aug., 1890. (Shield had been sent up from company headquarters when the firing was heard, to investigate. On learning of the retirement on the right, Captain Sheppard ordered him to fall back when necessary.)

<sup>88</sup> Capt W. H. Sheppard, 17th Bn. Insurance surveyor, of Summer Hill, N.S.W., and Adelaide; b. Sydney, 26 Jan., 1890.

sunken road 1,000 yards in advance of Noreuil. This was the same Lagnicourt-Bullecourt road that had been the objective of the 50th and 51st Battalions in the fight for Noreuil on April 2nd.<sup>89</sup> With the exception of a picquet on the right,<sup>90</sup> which had already been surrounded, the posts succeeded in withdrawing to it. Several machine-guns of the 5th Company under Lieutenant Dakin<sup>91</sup> were there, and were now placed to defend the right flank down in the valley. But the enemy following up not only continued to attack the road from in front, but worked up the spur on the other side of the valley and established a machine-gun enfilading the road precisely in the same position from which the right of the 50th had been enfiladed on the day of the capture of Noreuil.<sup>92</sup> Seeing that on the left also the enemy was threatening to enfilade the road, Captain Sheppard decided to fall back on the trench close behind it—the same in which the 51st Battalion had ensconced itself



The white arrows show the German attack.

after its advance on the morning of April 2nd. As the supporting troops of the 2nd Division lay much closer and more thickly than those of the widely extended 1st, this trench was already partly occupied by a reserve company of the 17th under Captain Ronald.<sup>93</sup> The left of Sheppard's company duly withdrew to it, but the right was under too heavy a fire. A few men, attempting to cross the open, were killed. Shield, fighting with his revolver and urging his men to hold out to the last, was severely wounded. The enemy, just as on April 2nd, penetrated along the bottom of the valley, lined the bank there in rear of the road, and set up a machine-gun close in front of Noreuil. Lieutenant Dakin, commanding the 5th

<sup>89</sup> See pp. 209 et seq.

<sup>90</sup> Part of Lieutenant F. W. D. Smith's platoon. (Smith belonged to Bristol, Eng.)

<sup>91</sup> Lieut. C. H. Dakin, 5th M.G. Coy. Orchardist; of Woodford, N.S.W.; b. North Sydney, 18 Nov., 1894. Killed in action, 15 April, 1917.

<sup>92</sup> See pp. 216 et seq.

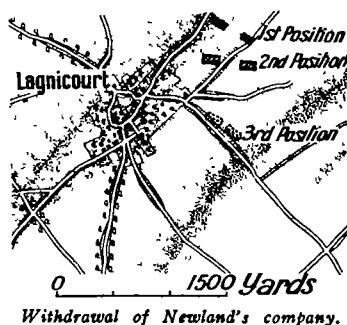
<sup>93</sup> Major H. S. Ronald, D.S.O., 17th Bn, and Inf. and Gen. Base Depot, A.I.F., 1940. Commercial traveller; of Harbord, N.S.W.; b. Armadale, Vic., 8 May, 1890.

Company's four machine-guns, was shot by the enemy from this direction, and the Australians remaining in the road, about thirty in number, were eventually charged from the right and captured.<sup>94</sup> The enemy lined the road and placed two machine-guns there. All the subalterns of Sheppard's company<sup>95</sup> had been wounded, and Sergeant Kirkpatrick,<sup>96</sup> now his main assistant, after killing three Germans, was himself killed. But the enemy's advance was stayed.

Thus on the northern side of the breach the Germans had bent back, but not broken through, the 17th Battalion. On the southern side, south-east of Lagnicourt, the position was similar, though more serious

**12th Battalion  
(1st Division)**

—the enemy had broken through the company of the 12th north of the village, but failed to break its next company. The leader of this was Captain Newland, the same who in the previous week had rallied and sustained the 12th in its difficult attack and counter-attack upon Boursies. After his sentry groups had given their warning and come in, his picquets<sup>97</sup> held off the Germans for a quarter of an hour and, when the Germans outflanked them, fell back to a position in the open half-way to the supports.<sup>98</sup> Here they had an excellent field of fire but no protection, and therefore, after another stand, Newland, who was the life of the defence, ordered them to fall back on the sunken Lagnicourt-Doignies road south-east of the village—the same position that had been held by Captain



<sup>94</sup> One of them, Private J. L. Newman (of Balmain, N.S.W.), of the 17th Battalion, in May 1918 succeeded in escaping into Russia.

<sup>95</sup> Lieutenants F. W. D. Smith, R. V. Shield, and R. T. Phelps (of Tuilamore, N.S.W.).

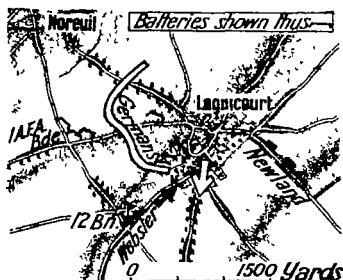
<sup>96</sup> Sgt. G. Kirkpatrick, M.M. (No. 934; 17th Bn). Farmer; of Kempsey, N.S.W.; b. Armadale, N.S.W., 3 June, 1889. Killed in action, 15 April, 1917.

<sup>97</sup> Newland's left picquet was under Sergeant S. W. M. Hillman (of Kalgoorlie, W. Aust.). Sergeant N. Ranson (of Derby, Tas.) also took a party to the left, which he saw to be threatened. Corporal M. G. Blackman (of Toowoomba, Q'land) held on to a small post until ordered to retire, though all his men except one had been hit.

<sup>98</sup> A few men were surrounded and captured, the Germans having already got past some of the posts.

Cherry and his company of the 26th at the taking of Lagnicourt.<sup>99</sup> Here Newland's company was lining the bank, firing, when, shortly after 5, day began to break.

At this hour headquarters of the 12th Battalion at the important cross-roads 750 yards south-west of the village,<sup>100</sup> overlooking the Lagnicourt valley, became aware that the enemy was advancing towards the guns of the 1st A.F.A. Brigade, half-way up the valley, and was also coming out of the nearest edge of Lagnicourt along the road leading to Morchies, which village lay a mile south of battalion headquarters. The commander of the 12th, Lieutenant-Colonel Elliott, faced this alarming situation with characteristic quietness and deliberation. He reported to the brigadier that the right of the 2nd Division had fallen back,<sup>101</sup> but that he was forming a defensive flank and was confident that he could hold on. To form that flank, he sent his intelligence officer, Lieutenant Webster,<sup>102</sup> with a hurriedly gathered platoon to find touch with Captain Newland, while the batmen, cooks, signallers, and others at headquarters lined the bank of the headquarters road and opened fire on the enemy now just visible coming up the valley.



Webster, mistaking Elliott's intention, tried to enter Lagnicourt village, and was met by fierce fire, being himself shot down and captured, while the remnant of his men was driven back. But his action probably checked any penetration towards Morchies. Meanwhile Elliott transferred a machine-gun of the 21st Company,<sup>103</sup> which happened to be near by on duty against aircraft, to the road-bank from which it could fire on the valley. On the edge of Lagnicourt a group of Germans was clustering round the abandoned howitzers of

<sup>99</sup> On March 26 (see pp. 195-6).

<sup>100</sup> See pp. 190-1.

<sup>101</sup> So had the left flank of the 1st, but each unit genuinely believed that the "break through" had occurred in its neighbour's ground.

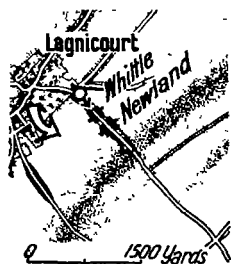
<sup>102</sup> Lieut. J. Webster, 12th Bn. Accountant and secretary; of Launceston, Tas., and East Malvern, Vic.; b. Hobart, 1 Oct., 1891.

<sup>103</sup> This gun was in charge of Private E. T. Colbert (of Wyuna, Vic.).

the 102nd Battery. The machine-gun opened on them, and they fled to cover. It then turned on others near the guns of the 1st Brigade and checked their advance.

It was now 5.30. The Germans in the Lagnicourt valley were a mile and a half behind the original line of the Australian front, with the handful at 12th Battalion Headquarters firing into their flank, when the first support arrived. This was the nearest company of the 9th, which about 5.20 had been alarmed by a stray man of the 12th with the news that "the Germans have broken through in thousands!" Its commander, Captain Boylan,<sup>104</sup> immediately lined it out, bayonets fixed, along the bank of the Morchies-Maricourt Wood road in which it was bivouacked. Then some of the gunners came through with their breech-blocks, and Boylan took his company forward to 12th Battalion Headquarters.<sup>105</sup> On its arriving there at 6.20, Elliott lined it along the bank of his road, and, opening fire, it finally stopped the enemy, now only a few hundred yards away.

An attempt by the Germans to come out of the east of Lagnicourt, in rear of Newland's line and between him and Elliott, had also been foiled. Shortly after 5, Newland's men in the Doignies road had found shots coming from their left and rear, and looking round saw the enemy issuing along the roads from that side of Lagnicourt. Newland turned part of his men about, to line the rear bank of the road, while others held the front, and with fire drove the enemy back. A dangerous attempt by a German machine-gun crew to set up its gun directly on Newland's flank, in the same road that he occupied, was defeated by Sergeant Whittle, who, instantly grasping the danger, ran out alone, bombed and killed the crew before they could open fire, and brought back the gun.<sup>106</sup>



<sup>104</sup> Capt. J. S. Boylan, M.C.; 9th Bn. Stoker in R.A.N.; of Kangaroo Point, Q'land, b Manchester, Eng., 26 Sept., 1889. (Boylan was at the same time warned by 3rd Brigade Headquarters.)

<sup>105</sup> Colonel Elliott had also sent for the company. Boylan started in artillery formation, but the scouts whom he sent forward reported the valley ahead to be full of Germans, and 12th Battalion H.Q. to have been captured by the enemy. Boylan accordingly "attacked," but found headquarters still holding its position.

<sup>106</sup> For their actions in this fight and during the previous week's attack on Boursies, both Newland and Whittle were awarded the Victoria Cross.

By these movements the enemy's penetration south and west of Lagnicourt was stopped; but Elliott's small band and the company of the 9th at 12th Battalion Headquarters still "felt that they were holding up the whole German Army," when someone shouted "Go it lads! Reinforcements coming." Looking over their shoulders, the men saw troops approaching across the open and doubling along the roads "for miles back."<sup>107</sup> These were the two reserve companies of the 9th<sup>108</sup> sent up to reinforce Elliott, and two companies of the 20th Battalion which had been set in motion by order of the neighbouring 5th Brigade of the 2nd Division.

Headquarters of the 5th Brigade, in a ruined house near the forward end of Noreuil, had learned at 4.35 that some outposts of the 17th Battalion were being  
**Noreuil Valley** attacked; but it was not until 4.55 that a small party of the 12th, withdrawing up the low ridge between Lagnicourt and Noreuil, tumbled into the bivouac of the 19th Battalion, which was in support to the 17th, in two sunken roads south of Noreuil, and informed Lieutenant-Colonel Pye<sup>109</sup> that the Germans had broken through. A few minutes later two men of the 17th reported that in the Hirondelle valley leading to Noreuil also their posts had been driven back. Pye telephoned to the commander of the 5th Brigade, General Smith, who was thus early informed of the point of penetration, though, in the dark, its extent and direction were unknown. In this emergency the measures taken by Smith—a big, slow-speaking Australian business man, in peace time a wool broker of Geelong—were singularly apt and level-headed. It is true that the conditions in his area were very different from those in the 1st Division's. Although the Germans in Lagnicourt valley had only a low spur between them and the eleven batteries in Noreuil valley, yet in that space was bivouacked, on the northern side of the spur, the 19th Battalion; and further back, in

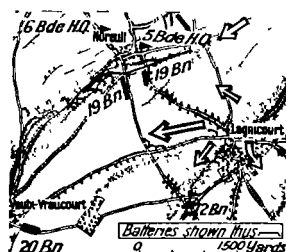
<sup>107</sup> According to Private D. W. McNairn (of Helidon, Q'land), 9th Battalion, who has left a vivid account of the fight.

<sup>108</sup> One company of the 9th and one of the 10th had been retained as protection for brigade headquarters and the artillery at and round Morchies.

<sup>109</sup> Lieut.-Col. C. R. A. Pye, D.S.O. Commanded 17th Bn., 1916/17; 19th Bn., 1917. Medical practitioner; of Windsor, N.S.W.; b. Winusor, 13 July, 1890. Killed in action, 4 Oct., 1917.



front of Vaulx-Vraucourt, directly ahead of the enemy, lay the 20th. Smith at once ordered these two battalions to send out patrols to ascertain where the intruding enemy had got to. Meanwhile the 19th was to establish a defensive flank along the summit of the ridge between Noreuil and Lagnicourt, and the 20th to form a strong-point in front of the Bois de Vaulx looking down into both branches of the Lagnicourt valley.



*Note.—Bois de Vaulx is the wood east of 20 Bn.*

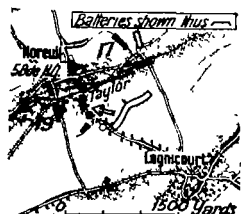
The patrols went out, those of the 20th being followed by two of its companies, one of which, under Captain McDonald,<sup>110</sup> moved along the direct road from Vaulx towards Lagnicourt, the other along a road half-a-mile further to the right, leading past the 12th Battalion Headquarters. But for the next hour the only news that reached General Smith was from the 17th Battalion in front of Noreuil, which kept him informed of the gradual driving back of its right company. About 5.45, however, information began to arrive from several quarters. Lieutenant-Colonel Ralston of the 20th telephoned that gunners of the batteries near Lagnicourt reported the loss of their guns. Captain Sheppard of the 17th reported the Germans getting round his right flank. Two platoons of a reserve company of the 17th were sent under Lieutenant Ellis to support him, but were met by machine-gun fire which caused sharp loss.<sup>111</sup> At 6, the light becoming clear, Germans were seen coming up the spur and the Hirondelle valley towards Noreuil itself. Smith accordingly ordered the 19th to extend its remaining companies so as to close the gap between the 17th and the 20th.

But the Germans were too close to allow the 19th to carry out in full the part laid down for it. An advanced company of the battalion was in the Lagnicourt–Noreuil road, from the forward curve of which on the other side of

<sup>110</sup> Major J. H. McDonald, D.S.O., M.C.; 20th Bn. Farmer; of Gympie district, Q'land, and Summer Hill, N.S.W.; b Summer Hill, 2 Nov., 1888

<sup>111</sup> Ellis was mortally wounded. (Lieut H. Ellis, 17th Bn. Clerk, of Mosman, N.S.W.; b. Caledon, Co. Tyrone, Ireland, 1886. Died of wounds, 16 April, 1917.)

the spur Vowles of the 12th and his reserve platoon had been driven back a few minutes earlier.<sup>112</sup> On receiving General Smith's first order to make a flank along that ridge, Pye at 5.15 had sent up Captain Taylor<sup>113</sup> to the forward company to carry it out. Taylor hurriedly placed a Lewis gun higher up the road, near the crest of the spur, and extended a platoon with two Lewis guns to his right rear, along the near edge of the summit. Just then, against the sky, were seen a large number of troops coming over the rise from Lagnicourt valley. Taylor, uncertain whether they were Australians or Germans, kept his men from firing until the strangers were 200 yards away, when an enemy machine-gun crew established itself in the road to his right and by opening fire disclosed the identity of this force.



The detached Lewis gunners came running in, but the rest of the company, protected by a bend in the road, was waiting with rifles aimed, and 200 men now opened fire simultaneously on the advancing Germans.

The effect was immediate. A few Germans who were already close to the elbow of the road rushed into the bend and began bombing Lieutenant Belcher's<sup>114</sup> platoon on the extreme right but were quickly subdued by the answering Mills grenades. The Germans out on the open spur dropped into whatever cover they could find. The German machine-gun crew was silenced by one of the Lewis guns on the right flank.<sup>115</sup>

With suppressed excitement Brigadier-General Smith and his staff had watched this advance from an open window<sup>116</sup> in their headquarters only 350 yards away. The Germans were approaching up the Hirondelle valley also, but some of the 17th with Lewis guns and rifles were firing from the farthest houses of the village, a second company of the 19th

<sup>112</sup> It was probably some of Vowles's men who had warned Colonel Pye.

<sup>113</sup> Brigadier H. B. Taylor, M.C., V.D., 19th Bn. Commands 22nd Inf. Bde., A.I.F., 1940. Analyst, of Longueville, N.S.W.; b. Sydney, 10 Aug., 1890.

<sup>114</sup> Lieut. E. Belcher, M.C.; 19th Bn. Warehouseman; of Maryborough, Q'land; b. Aramac, Q'land, 26 Sept., 1889.

<sup>115</sup> Most of the Lewis gun team was shot down, but Private A. E. Brown (of Worrongorra, Condobolin, N.S.W.) held on and beat down the enemy.

<sup>116</sup> This window is shown in Vol. XII, plate 308

was lining that end of the Lagnicourt road, and part of a third was moving round the village to connect with the 17th. About 300 yards from Smith's headquarters the nearest Germans turned and made for shelter.

By this time part of the field artillery of the centre and left groups was putting down what Smith describes as "a very excellent barrage" farther down the Hirondeille valley and across the spur, towards Lagnicourt. At 5 a.m. General Rosenthal, commanding the artillery massed under the 2nd Division, had informed these groups as to the break-through on the boundary between the two divisions and had ordered them to lay a barrage there. The central group, in Noreuil valley, was prevented from



The cloud indicates the barrage.

doing so by the proximity of the spur on its right, which its shells could not clear. The left group, on the other hand, being emplaced on the plateau in rear of Ecoust, ran its guns back from their emplacements and, swinging them round, opened fire on the line specified.<sup>117</sup> About daybreak, when the Germans became visible pouring along the spur south-east of Noreuil, Captain Maclaren<sup>118</sup> of the 12th Battery, in the rear edge of Noreuil, instantly ran two of his guns out of their pits and turned them direct on the enemy at 400 yards' range,<sup>119</sup> tearing visible gaps in the German ranks. Close beside him the 101st Howitzer Battery was set by its commander, Major Selmes, to barrage the spur only 1,000 yards from his guns, but, this range proving difficult, Selmes lengthened so as to throw his fire on the German entanglement near Quéant, through which the enemy had presumably

<sup>117</sup> This group had been hampered by a barrage thrown by the Germans in rear of Longatte, which temporarily diverted attention in that direction and also cut the telephone wires of the artillery.

<sup>118</sup> Capt. W. Maclaren, M.C.; 12th Bty., A.F.A. Ledgerkeeper, of Middle Park, Vic.; b. Numurkah, Vic., 12 Nov., 1894.

<sup>119</sup> Before this firing finished, the 12th Battery had run out two more guns, and fired about 100 shells. The Germans broke, but rallied in a hollow in which the guns could still find them. A shell from another battery struck the road in which was the forward line of the 19th; but Captain Taylor of that battalion, jumping on to the road-bank, waved his arms, and the fire was raised.

issued. Several other batteries in Noreuil valley ran out guns.<sup>120</sup> At the same time the left group of the 1st Division's artillery (14th Brigade, A.F.A.<sup>121</sup>), behind Morchies, having sent an officer (Lieutenant Borwick<sup>122</sup>) to the 12th Battalion's Headquarters, was laying its barrage on the same crest<sup>123</sup> from an almost opposite direction.

The cross-fire there must have been highly distressing to the enemy, but it was not maintained without sacrifice. The 43rd Battery, high on the Ecooust-Vraucourt road, was always in danger of being directly observed,<sup>124</sup> and, with its guns dragged out into the open, it was detected at day-break, apparently by observers in a German balloon which looked straight down the road. German artillery, both 5.9- and 4.2-inch, was immediately turned upon it, and quickly picking up the range at 6.30 hit one of the eighteen-pounders and set fire to several dumps of ammunition. In an inferno of shell-fire, and with dump after dump exploding around them, the surviving guns' crews continued to fire. Presently a second gun was hit, and an explosion of a shell in one of the burning dumps wrecked a third and killed its crew. As all the ammunition was now smouldering, Major Pybus,<sup>125</sup> a young Tasmanian recently given command of the battery, ordered his remaining men to remove the wounded and withdraw. He himself and Lieutenant Clarke,<sup>126</sup> waiting to see all clear, were killed by a German shell. More than half of the crews and officers had been hit, and three of the five guns destroyed.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> These included the 13th (Major J. Ray) and the 104th Howitzer (Lieutenant W. R. Birks). Captain J. E. Mitchell of the 104th Battery, establishing an observation post on the ridge between Lagnicourt and Noreuil, directed the fire of two howitzers on to Lagnicourt. (Ray, who was killed as the result of an accident on 5 Oct., 1918, belonged to South Melbourne, Birks to Adelaide; Mitchell to Perth, W. Aust.)

<sup>121</sup> This brigade was part of the 5th Divisional Artillery which was then serving with the 1st Division.

<sup>122</sup> Capt. H. B. Borwick, M.C.; 14th A.F.A. Bde. University student; of Melbourne; b. Melbourne, 4 May, 1895.

<sup>123</sup> On the line of the Lagnicourt-Noreuil road.

<sup>124</sup> See p. 359. Its group, the left, was formed by the 4th Division's artillery.

<sup>125</sup> Major R. K. Pybus. Commanded 43rd Bty., A.F.A., 1917. Railway clerk; of Launceston, Tas.; b. Hobart, 26 Nov., 1890. Killed in action, 15 April, 1917.

<sup>126</sup> Lieut. E. J. H. Clarke, 43rd Bty., A.F.A. Bank clerk; of Prospect, S. Aust.; b. Kapunda, S. Aust., 5 Dec., 1891. Killed in action, 15 April, 1917.

<sup>127</sup> Of 3 officers and 40 men, there were killed 2 officers and 12 men; wounded, 8 men. Four "number ones" were killed. Pybus's last words were: "Tell my wife I died at my guns." A medical orderly, Private G. W. Freeman (of Sydney) brought in his body and took his papers to group headquarters, which only then received news of the incident.

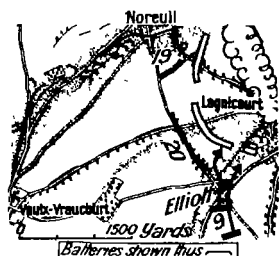
An hour after day-break General Rosenthal received a belated report that the infantry was retiring. Fearing that the batteries of the Noreuil group were in danger, and recognising that in their present position they were useless for covering the indented front, Rosenthal at 7 o'clock decided to withdraw them to a position in rear. On assurance, however, that the danger was not immediate, he gave the group commander (Colonel Rabett) discretion to act as he thought necessary, but meanwhile, in case of need, ordered up the gun-teams of both this and the left group.<sup>128</sup> As matters turned out, however, these precautions, though prudent and well justified, were unnecessary. With full daylight—at first clear, though rain set in soon afterwards—the Germans in the Noreuil valley and spur were under tremendous fire. Not only did part of the 18th Battalion, farther north, and a platoon and some Lewis guns of the supporting 22nd<sup>129</sup> join in, but batmen, cooks, and signallers at headquarters, catching up their long unused rifles, blazed at the bewildered Germans. As the enemy began to waver, the fire increased; but over the spur in Lagnicourt valley, there were swiftly developing the events which gave the German irruption its *coup-de-grâce*.

It was not until 6.30 that the patrols sent out by the 20th furnished their report—that the Germans had reached the sunken Noreuil-Morchies road, half-way up the valley from Lagnicourt. The **The Australian counter-attack** two companies which had followed the patrols immediately advanced from the south-west in one long extended line to this road, the Germans, a few of whom had crossed it, running back in front of them. Almost at the same time Colonel Elliott of the 12th launched from the south-east the company of

<sup>128</sup> The teams came up to Vaulx-Vraucourt. As a matter of precaution the teams of part of the 5th Division's artillery were also sent up towards their guns, and the horses at some of the forward headquarters were saddled.

<sup>129</sup> The 22nd was support battalion of the 6th Brigade, which was holding part of the railway embankment and cutting west of the 5th. General Gellibrand sent the detachment at the request of Major Selmes (101st Battery) to safeguard his howitzers. A Lewis gunner of the 22nd (L/Cpl. W. A. Tourrier, of Stony Creek and Glenferrie, Vic.; killed at Broodseinde, 9 Oct., 1917) estimated that his gun accounted for 40 Germans. "I was the envy of all the battalion gunners."

the 9th which had first reached him. It moved half-way across the front of the 20th to about the middle of the valley, and then, at 7.10, after five minutes' halt, the three companies intermingling, and with a newly-arrived company of the 9th on their right flank, swept down the valley,<sup>130</sup> the Germans breaking in front of them. During these movements German machine-guns, firing from the edge of the village, caused some casualties, Lieutenants Mearns<sup>131</sup> and Ross<sup>132</sup> and a score of men of the 20th, and about the same number of the 9th, being hit, for the most part lightly.



But the enthusiasm of the troops was overflowing. For the first time they had before them an enemy whom they realised to be thoroughly beaten. Almost for the first time, also, they knew with certainty that the attack in which they were taking part was achieving solid advantage for their side—and the effect upon their spirits was observable for months afterwards. They drove their opponents in front of them, past the north of the village. On the right Lieutenant Wittkopp<sup>133</sup> of the 9th and a handful of both battalions dived into the village, following the fleeing Germans and coming on many others who surrendered without an attempt to escape.<sup>134</sup> The barrage of the Australian field artillery still lay on the outskirts of the village, and the line was temporarily halted while requests were sent for the range to be lengthened.

Meanwhile the 19th, in the Noreuil–Lagnicourt road, realising that the Germans on the spur in its front were beaten, had at 6.40 asked for the barrage there also to be

<sup>130</sup> The 20th had then been reorganised into two waves. Lieutenant Martin (21st M G Company) and some of the machine-gunners who had been driven from their posts took part as infantry in this attack.

<sup>131</sup> Capt N R Mearns, 20th Bn. High school teacher; of Lithgow and Hunter's Hill, N.S.W.; b. Bathurst, N.S.W., 3 Dec., 1888.

<sup>132</sup> Lieut H. H. Ross, 20th Bn. Carpenter; of Bogan Gate, N.S.W.; b. Parkes, N.S.W., 25 Sept., 1888.

<sup>133</sup> Capt C. A. Wittkopp, M.C.; 9th Bn Plumber; of Kingaroy, Q'land; b. Maryborough, Q'land, 12 Feb., 1895.

<sup>134</sup> Here also was found Lieutenant Webster of the 12th, whose wound had been dressed by the enemy. Lieutenant R. H. Harrison of the 12th was also recaptured, but died later in hospital.

advanced. The guns lifted their fire 400 yards farther on, and the Germans, caught between it and the Lewis guns and rifles, gave up the fight. Everywhere they began to hold up hands and come in. Two or three Australians, some of them unarmed, went out and brought in 147 prisoners, together with two machine-guns and two converted Lewis guns. The 17th Battalion also, in the 51st's old trench beyond Noreuil, realised that the enemy was wavering. The supporting company (Captain Ronald's), which was under orders to attack, at once scrambled out. A few shots were fired at it and two men hit, and then the Germans lining the sunken road close ahead held up their hands and surrendered.

From all parts of the spur north of Lagnicourt the Germans—near the front in twos and threes, farther back in formed bodies—were now heading back for the Hindenburg Line. The heavy artillery supporting I Anzac had, shortly after 5 o'clock, been asked by Rosenthal to barrage the break in the front, and its fire was now being directed largely by messages from an aeroplane of the 15th Squadron which since 6.30 had been patrolling the sector. The pilot, Lieutenant Buckingham,<sup>135</sup> (who happened to be an Australian), and Lieutenant Cox,<sup>136</sup> his observer, seeing Germans thrusting up the Lagnicourt valley, had flown to the advanced landing ground to make sure that a counter-attack was in progress, and then continued to scout low over the whole area, harassing with machine-gun fire the parties in Noreuil valley, and directing the attention of both artillery and infantry upon those endeavouring to retire from Lagnicourt. They called down artillery-fire on a body of 200 Germans which at 8.5 was nearing the Hindenburg wire at Quéant—"the call was very well answered by our batteries," reported the observer afterwards; and, coming very low, they directed the attention of the Australian infantry to one group of Germans who appeared anxious to surrender.

At 7.30 the barrage had been lifted from Lagnicourt on to a line protecting the original front, and the 20th and 9th had

<sup>135</sup> Capt. W. Buckingham, M.C.; Royal Air Force. Student; of Petersham, N.S.W., b. Sydney, 7 April, 1893.

<sup>136</sup> Wing Commander W. R. Cox, M.C., A.F.C., Royal Air Force. Shipbuilding engineer; b. Falmouth, Cornwall, Eng., 15 July, 1895.

resumed their advance, Newland's company of the 12th joining in on the right. As these approached the old outpost-trenches, the enemy there surrendered. On the left the line of the 17th was reoccupied by Captain Ronald's company. By 8.30 this part of the front had been re-established, although until night a gap existed between the posts of the 19th and those of the 20th, which temporarily held the left of the 1st Division's front. The artillery continued for an hour and a half<sup>137</sup> to shell the German wire at Quéant, through part of which the retreating enemy must pass, and, shortly after noon, on the receipt of a message from the infantry that Quéant was "full of troops," that village was again shelled. A report that the Germans retiring through their own wire had been caught by the heavy artillery and cut to pieces furnished precisely the sort of well-rounded tale that captivated commanding officers, and there subsequently flew round the staffs various semi-official exaggerations of the loss—estimated in thousands—inflicted on the Germans in their wire.<sup>138</sup> It is indeed by this supposed incident that the battle is chiefly remembered. Yet German historians go out of their way to record that the attack was defeated by machine-guns, and General von Moser, the German commander, notes that most of the wounded whom he afterwards interrogated in hospital had been hit by machine-gun bullets.

As soon as Lagnicourt valley had been cleared, the artillery-men of the right group went back to their guns. They found that the guns of the 1st A.F.A. Brigade had not been damaged by the German infantry; it had reached them, but was driven back without having attempted to destroy them.<sup>139</sup> Of the twenty-one pieces<sup>140</sup> of the 2nd A.F.A. Brigade, which had been in possession of the enemy for two hours, only five had been damaged. The counter-attack found the Germans busily looting the dugouts of the

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<sup>137</sup> The heavy artillery ceased at 9.35 a.m., the field artillery at 10.

<sup>138</sup> Actually, the body of troops upon which the aeroplane chiefly directed the guns numbered only 200 and, although the shooting was most effective, it is improbable that half of these were hit. The Germans in this part were by no means wholly disorganised, for eighteen men of the 17th who were sent out under a sergeant by Captain Ronald to find the flank of the 20th, and who advanced too far and mistook a body of the enemy for the 20th, were at once heavily fired on, cut off, and captured.

<sup>139</sup> Two of the guns were, however, put out of action this day by fire from the German artillery, apparently firing with direct observation (*see p. 395*).

<sup>140</sup> Exclusive of three guns of the 4th Battery, already destroyed by shell-fire.



artillery, searching for food and souvenirs. They had indeed placed destructive charges in the muzzles of three guns of the 4th Battery<sup>141</sup> and of all howitzers of the 102nd, and were beginning work upon the 5th Battery when driven away. Seeing the Australians approaching, they hurriedly fired three charges in the 4th Battery, and one in the 102nd; the others were found unexploded. In addition, a gun-wheel in the 6th Battery had been smashed by a bomb. Thirty-one guns, all of which had been reached by the Germans, were in action again that afternoon.

On the rest of the front the Germans, after falling back to the nearest shelter or digging in as best they could in the open, held on for the most part until nightfall and then withdrew. The re-establishment of the original line was at once ordered, and in most places easily effected; but in the 11th Battalion the exhaustion was too great. The dangerously advanced positions on the spur north-east of Louverval were not reoccupied, the front there remaining practically along the line to which the 11th had been driven.

In defeating this attack the I Anzac Corps suffered 1,010 casualties, of which at least 300 represented prisoners.<sup>142</sup> The staff of I Anzac overestimated the enemy's loss, reckoning the dead alone at 1,500; but, from the four officers and 358 other Germans who were captured,<sup>143</sup> there was obtained a fairly accurate notion of the course of the fight and of the German intentions. The full reason for the attack, however,

<sup>141</sup> Its other three, with their crews, had been destroyed by shell-fire during the recent bombardments of Lagnicourt valley (*see p. 359*).

<sup>142</sup> Only four of these were officers. The Germans captured some 15 machine guns. The losses were distributed as follows (the number of the "missing" included in any total is shown in brackets; more than 80 per cent of these were prisoners).—

<i>1st Aust. Division.</i>				<i>2nd Aust. Division.</i>			
Artillery	..	7	1st M.G. Coy. ..	1	Artillery	..	33 (8)
21st M.G. Coy.	23	(20)	9th Bn.	.. 35	17th Bn.	..	181 (51)
1st Bn.	..	14	10th Bn.	.. 11	19th Bn.	..	69
2nd Bn.	..	12	11th Bn.	.. 245 (180)	20th Bn.	..	22
3rd Bn.	..	34	12th Bn.	.. 125 (37)			
4th Bn.	..	188 (55)	3rd M.G. Coy.	10 (6)			

<sup>143</sup> In addition, 5 machine-guns and 2 "converted" Lewis guns were taken. One of these machine-guns was taken by Private E Pinches (of Ithaca, Q'land), 5th M.G. Company, a boy of sixteen, who rushed it with bombs and captured the crew. He died on May 5, of wounds received the previous day at Bullecourt.

was not known until after the war, when the memoirs of General von Moser and the diary of Crown Prince Rupprecht were published.

The notion of the attack was born on the morning of April 13, when General Otto von Moser, recently promoted to command the XIV Reserve Corps, on returning from his "constitutional" ride learnt from his chief-of-staff that army headquarters had just telephoned that the 3rd Guard Division was being sent to reinforce him. Army headquarters considered that his front was likely to be attacked, and that its extent—something over 11,000 yards—was too great to be safely defended by two divisions. The new division was a distinguished one, with a reputation for being sent east or west wherever troubles were thickest,<sup>144</sup> but it was now fresh from three and a half months of quiet trench duty in Lorraine. Moser's chief-of-staff<sup>145</sup> expressed the opinion that the best way of warding off any threatened attack would be to make use of this fresh division to attack their opponents while the latter were still incompletely dug in and "strongly shaken" by the defeat of April 11.

General von Moser leapt at the proposal; for months he had held the view that the Germans should seize every opportunity to attack in order to give their enemy a fall, teach him to respect them, and raise the morale of their own troops which, he thought, tended to deteriorate under this continual standing on the defensive. In his enthusiasm for the project, it struck him also that such an offensive might draw British reserves away from the Arras front—the very step that was urgently required at the moment. He at once telephoned to army headquarters explaining his notion, proposing to employ also one of his other divisions, the 2nd Guard Reserve, and suggesting that it was desirable that the corps on his left should be asked to co-operate. The answer came, as he says, "swift as lightning." Not only was the proposal approved, but the two divisions adjoining his left flank were given to him, in addition to his own, for the operation.

The explanation of this sudden decision was that Moser's suggestion found the German commanders, all the way up the hierarchy, somewhat mortified and depressed by the long withdrawal, however much they acclaimed its success, and keenly longing for a different attitude. "His project pleased me," writes Crown Prince Rupprecht.<sup>146</sup> "The best parry is the thrust! I am more and more tending to the view that of late we have made too little use of the offensive. This destroys the spirit of the troops as of their leader." Moser shows himself<sup>147</sup> delighted with this endorsement. "For the attack I have the disposal of four full divisions. Besides this, I can furnish them with support by the artillery of the divisions adjoining them on north and south.<sup>148</sup> . . . We 'hurrah' and set ourselves like lightning to the work, for there is no time to lose—the Arras front demands the swiftest possible relief and it is necessary to give the enemy no time for entrenching his line. I myself draw up the operation orders, and the staff at the same time works on the different arrangements for ammunition, supply, medical service, etc"

<sup>144</sup> In October 1916 it had been transferred from the Somme battle to the Galician front, where it was involved in very heavy fighting near the Narajowka. It was next brought back to rest in Baden and Alsace, and then sent to Lorraine.

<sup>145</sup> Major von Miaskowski.

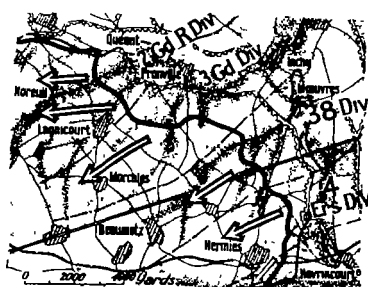
<sup>146</sup> *Mein Kriegstagebuch, Vol. 11, p. 143.*

<sup>147</sup> *Feldzugs-aufzeichnungen, p. 269.*

<sup>148</sup> The 27th, and 50th Reserve, Divisions.

Whether the divisions that were to be employed would have "hurrah-ed" at the spectacle of all this haste compelled by the supposed urgency of relieving the Arras front may be doubted. That evening von Moser gave verbal instructions to the four chiefs of the divisional staffs, but the carrying out of his instructions was not, as usual, left to the divisional commanders. Instead, the corps commander himself defined the objectives to be attained, and entrusted to specially appointed commanders the execution of his orders. The orders, with explanatory sketches, were sent out on the morning of the 14th. The operation would begin at 4 a.m. on the 15th, and was to be known by the code name of "Sturmbock."<sup>149</sup> For reasons of secrecy, no one beyond the artillery staffs and those at regimental headquarters was informed of the project until nightfall on the 14th. The operation order did not reach the divisions until that afternoon.

Moser was aware that the line opposite his centre and left was thinly held,<sup>150</sup> and that one artillery group lay close behind it, in the Noreuil valley; but it will astonish all Australians who recollect that day to learn that the Germans knew nothing beforehand as to the presence of guns in the Lagnicourt valley. Moser's plan was to put the 3rd Guard Division into the line south of Pronville, held till now by the left of the 2nd Guard Reserve Division, and then attack with all four divisions as follows (from north to south):



The arrows show the intended attack.

	Attacking Force.	Objective
2nd Guard Reserve Division	6 bns.	Noreuil and Lagnicourt.
3rd Guard Division	9 bns.	Morchies and Boursies.
38th Division	6 bns.	Doignies and Demicourt.
4th Ersatz Division	5 bns.	Hermies.

The infantry were to be accompanied by pioneers, and in the case of the 38th and 4th Ersatz Divisions by parts of the divisional "storm battalions," *flammenwerfer*, and "infantry-cannon," and were to be followed by selected batteries of artillery, of which two or three were allotted to each brigade.<sup>151</sup> All the villages mentioned above were to be taken, the neighbouring artillery and as much material as possible captured or destroyed, and a line beyond the villages held until after dark on the 15th, when the whole force would withdraw to its original line. On the 14th the army commander, General Freiherr von

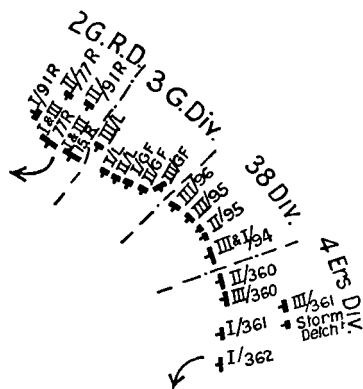
<sup>149</sup> The specified intentions were (a) radically to upset the approach of the hostile infantry and artillery, and capture and destroy as many men and as much material (especially guns) as possible; (b) to cripple the enemy's capacity for attack against the front of the XIV Reserve Corps and the part of the Arras group adjoining it to the north, so as to gain more time to build up the defence, and (c) to show the enemy that the German was still not in any way shaken and still knew how to attack, and how to conquer.

<sup>150</sup> This knowledge had been obtained from some prisoner of the 11th Battalion

<sup>151</sup> It was possibly one of these batteries whose fire destroyed the two guns of the 1st Brigade, A.F.A. (footnote 139, p. 392).

Falkenhausen,<sup>152</sup> paid von Moser a visit, and the latter lectured his four divisional commanders on the need for "cheerful co-operation, on which," he wisely said, "almost everything depends." To ensure surprise, the artillery was to fire in a normal manner during the night. At 3 a.m., when the infantry advanced, the guns were to open for ten minutes upon the Australian outpost-line and supposed battery positions. At 3.10 this fire would lift from the outposts on to the villages behind them. From 3.20 the artillery would shoot as required, the heaviest guns joining in at 4.30 and shelling the railways and communications at and around Bapaume. Under this bombardment the infantry, which would have assembled immediately in front of the Hindenburg wire, would advance in three waves of equal strength, disposed at 300-metre intervals. The first, well provided with bombs, machine-guns, *granatenwerfer* (and in the two southern divisions accompanied by storm troops and *flammenwerfer*), would subdue the Australian outpost-line and then move to the objective beyond the villages. The second wave would help it wherever it was held up, and for this purpose would be accompanied by the "infantry-cannon." The third would "mop up" and, when the objective was reached, would destroy—if it could not bring them back—any enemy guns within reach, sallying, where necessary, beyond the objective line to secure them. The pioneers and demolition parties would accompany this wave. The force would dig in on the objective and hold on until 8 p.m., when the main body would retire leaving small posts which might withdraw next day if strongly attacked. Two fighting squadrons of aeroplanes were to drive away British airmen.<sup>153</sup>

To describe the operation from the German left northwards. The 4th Ersatz Division,<sup>154</sup> the brigade commander, Major-General von Mechow, keeping the storm troops and a fifth battalion under his own command. This division had among the Australians a reputation for uncertain morale,<sup>155</sup> and



The attacking force, April 15.

<sup>152</sup> The army frontages on the German side had just been altered. General Fritz von Below, with most of the First Army staff, which since July 1916 had controlled this part of the front, had been sent to take over a section of the Seventh Army, threatened by the impending French attack. The XIV Reserve Corps now belonged to the Sixth Army. A few days later Falkenhausen was made Governor-General of Belgium in succession to General von Bissing, who had died. Command of the Sixth Army was then given to General Otto von Below.

<sup>153</sup> With the orders were circulated particulars concerning the Australian dispositions, based on statements by one or more of the captured men of the 11th Battalion. These gave some notion of the 11th's position, but were inaccurate in most other respects.

<sup>154</sup> The I/362 and I/361, combined as the "Regiment von Hugo," attacked towards Hermes, and the III and II/360 ("Regiment von Warnstedt") towards Demicourt. The III/361 was in reserve.

<sup>155</sup> Parts of it fought with great bravery at Stormy Trench, Hermies, and on this occasion, the action of other parts, however, betrayed them.

from the outset it met misfortune, the German artillery shooting into it at the commencement of the advance. The flare signal—"artillery shooting short"—was at once fired, but was not answered, and had to be frequently repeated. It was these flares that illuminated the advancing Germans for the Australian posts. The second and third waves, hurrying away from their own shells, became crowded together; and, to crown all, the Australian outposts "were met unexpectedly" far in advance of their supposed line—the Germans had not detected their recent approach. The attack was stopped by infantry fire.<sup>158</sup> Shortly after day-break two companies of the reserve were thrown in to fill a gap in the centre. But the efforts of the German artillery to suppress the Australian infantry-fire failed, and as the attack could not progress the Division was at 3 p.m. ordered to withdraw its troops. It retired without difficulty, leaving posts on its right south of the Cambrai road to cover the flank of the 38th Division. The 4th Ersatz Division took 11 prisoners, but lost 8 officers and 412 men.

The 38th Division attacked from Mœuvres with five battalions.<sup>157</sup> The resistance of the Australian outposts caused its waves to become mixed, and the third suffered particularly heavy loss by machine-gun fire. The division afterwards claimed that some of its men had penetrated into the northern edge of Demicourt and also into the east end of Boursies, "which changed hands many times" At 5.45 it was informed of the success of the troops farther north, and ordered to press on with its right and attack Louverval in co-operation with the 3rd Guard Division. Shortly before 8 o'clock there arrived a report that the 3rd Guard Division had captured Louverval park, and the divisional artillery was accordingly ordered to lift its fire from the village. Two hours later the report was found to be untrue. A subsequent decision to attack the park at midday after artillery bombardment was abandoned on the receipt at 10.30 of news that the divisions to right and left had been held up "with heavy loss," and the 2nd Guard Reserve Division driven back to the Hindenburg Line. The 38th Division withdrew without difficulty at 8 p.m. It claimed to have captured 147 prisoners and had lost 15 officers and 504 men.

The 3rd Guard Division employed only two of its regiments, the Guard Fusilier on its left and the Lehr on its right, the 9th Grenadier Regiment being held back to safeguard the Hindenburg Line. Of the six attacking battalions, the southernmost was echeloned to protect the division's left flank in case the 38th Division should fail. The ground was wholly unknown to the 3rd Guard Division, and it had no time to reconnoitre; indeed, the Fusilier Regiment was resting in billets ten miles away until dusk on the 14th, when it began to march up through "dark, stormy, raw weather." It was this regiment's left and centre that passed through the outposts of the 11th Australian Battalion. According to the German divisional report, the first posts were completely surprised, but the troops then came upon "cleverly distributed machine-gun nests," which had to be stormed, and this process caused so much loss that, in spite of reinforcement by the second wave and several attempts by the assault detachments, the advance broke

<sup>158</sup> The divisional report says that the shell-fire increased with daylight but was "fairly ineffective."

<sup>157</sup> The III and I/94, II and III/95, and III/96. Presumably another was in close reserve.

down.<sup>158</sup> The right of the Guard Fusilier was held up by Captain O'Neill's company on the left of the 11th, and made no progress.

In the Lehr Regiment<sup>159</sup> the northernmost battalion (III) was crossed in its approach march by a battalion of the 2nd Guard Reserve Division, and was over an hour late at the assembly position. In spite of an order that the regiment must advance at 3 o'clock, the troops were not in a position to do so until 4. This accident saved the right companies of the 12th Australian Battalion from being attacked at the same time as those in front of Lagnicourt. The resulting advantage to the defence was very great. The advance was immediately detected<sup>160</sup> and, except on the western flank, where part of the regiment entered Lagnicourt with the 2nd Guard Reserve Division, little ground was won. The right retired with the 2nd Guard Reserve, but the left held on till 8 p.m.

The 2nd Guard Reserve Division, which achieved most success on the German side, had constantly fought over the same ground in the withdrawal to the Hindenburg Line. Its commander, exhibiting the surprising degree of independence sometimes shown by German officers, decided, on the advice of his brigade commander, to ensure surprise by entirely abandoning the intensive bombardment from 3 to 3.20 (enjoined in corps orders) and attacking in absolute silence. "Thus," he explained afterwards, "the enemy should not obtain wind of our attack until we were actually in possession of his artillery-nests." After the infantry broke into Lagnicourt, the division's artillery laid its fire on the supposed positions of the Australian artillery at Ecoust, Vaulx-Vraucourt, and Maricourt Wood.

This change of plan was not even mentioned to the corps commander, who subsequently reprimanded his subordinate for this action. But it was undoubtedly the absence of artillery fire, combined with knowledge of the ground and enormous superiority in numbers, that led to the outstanding success of this division in the early stages. In other sectors the Australian posts were warned by the bombardment. The 2nd Guard Reserve Division, which had been in the line since June 1916, before the Battle of the Somme, attacked with two regiments, the 15th R.I.R. on its left and the 77th R.I.R. in the centre and on the right; the 1/91st R.I.R. guarded the right flank.<sup>161</sup> At 3.25 the

<sup>158</sup> *The History of the Guard Fusilier Regiment* (p. 162) says: "The attack encountered great difficulty and loss, especially through machine-gun fire from front and flanks. It made only slow headway against the strong enemy who was nested in the higher ground, and whose defences took excellent advantage of the terrain. Ultimately the English fire, constantly growing, increased the losses to such an extent that farther advance was useless. The attacking waves dug in 2,000 metres in advance of the Hindenburg Line. The objective, the line Lagnicourt-Hill 110 (west of Louverval), could not be reached." The same history throws light on the cutting off of Pope's and Lyon's posts. The 1st company, commencing its advance, passed, without being aware of it, between some Australian posts, lost touch, and in the end was driven by increasing fire to shelter in a deep gully. When daylight came the company saw the rest of the line several hundred yards in rear and, between the two positions, two occupied "English" trenches. "In this exceedingly uncomfortable position, with the British second line 100 metres in front, and the British front line, fully garrisoned, 500 metres in rear, the company held on till midday. Then the 'English' posts between the two lines held up their hands and—probably through anxiety owing to the German force having passed in rear of them—surrendered to the rear part of the battalion. Not till 9 p.m., after lying out seventeen hours, was the company able to withdraw to its battalion."

<sup>159</sup> As its name "Instructional Regiment" portends, this had originally been employed at Potsdam as a unit for training purposes.

<sup>160</sup> The German divisional report, however, attributes the discovery to a hand grenade exploding in some wire defences.

<sup>161</sup> The 11/91st R.I.R. was lent to the 15th R.I.R., whose 11 Battalion was in corps reserve.

15th R.I.R. reported that it had so far met only "weak" machine-gun fire. At 3.50 the 77th R.I.R. stated that the spur between Noreuil and Lagnicourt had been taken without "special loss" and without a shot from the opposing artillery. At 4 the 15th R.I.R. had taken Lagnicourt "without resistance." At 5.15 the I/77th approached Noreuil up the Hirondele valley, and the III/77th tried to reach the Noreuil group of artillery, whose existence was known to it. At the same time, with the 15th R.I.R. on its left, it advanced to the batteries in the Lagnicourt valley, whose presence there was a complete surprise; German airmen had failed to observe them, and they were believed to be still about Vaulx-Vraucourt.

Towards 6 o'clock the German infantry in the Hirondele valley and on the spur south of it began to feel more and more severely the shell-fire from the Australian batteries behind Ecoust and at Morchies. German accounts state that it was this fire, directed by the British airman who persisted in flying low over the whole area, that stopped the attack by 7.15; by 7.50 the 15th R.I.R. was reported to be in retreat, pursued by this aviator. That regiment was ordered to retake the spur between Lagnicourt and Noreuil, but about the same time (8.15) the commanders of the III/77th and I/15th R.I.R., in hurried conference on the Noreuil-Lagnicourt road, decided that the only possible course was to fall back. The 9th company of the 77th R.I.R., which had tried to reach Noreuil across the spur, was entirely cut off, but the remainder retired under artillery and machine-gun fire to a position 1,000 yards in front of the Hindenburg Line, which was then being tremendously shelled. Here the troops remained until 10, when the divisional commander ordered them to fall back on the Hindenburg Line, leaving strong outposts. The British fire died down, and by 11.50 the troops had withdrawn.

The 2nd Guard Reserve Division claimed to have blown up twenty-two guns by explosions in the bore, and to have damaged eleven others. Its pioneers while in Lagnicourt destroyed several wells by exploding mines which had been left unexploded in them when the Australians rushed the town on March 26th. Documents and maps showing the disposition of headquarters and other units and centres of the 1st Australian Division were secured, and it was claimed that 283 prisoners were made.<sup>162</sup> The division lost 829 officers and men, many of whom were prisoners. The total loss of the Germans in this action is given as 2,313.<sup>163</sup>

General von Moser in his memoirs expresses satisfaction with the general results of his attack. His chief, the Crown Prince Rupprecht, also appears to have been satisfied with the first reports, but less so later, when a fuller narrative had reached him. "Apart from the success in blowing up of 22 guns," he notes, "the operation achieved only trifling result at a cost of fairly high casualties, which amounted to 9 per cent of the troops that took part." Had he been aware of the truth—that the troops were so busy with looting that only

<sup>162</sup> Including only one officer. The claims of this and other German divisions are greatly in excess of the actual number of prisoners captured by them, which totalled about 300.

<sup>163</sup> The 2nd Guard Reserve Division lost 829, the 38th Division 519, and 4th Ersatz Division 420. This leaves 545 as the loss of the 3rd Guard Division.

five guns were damaged—his satisfaction would have been slighter. Twenty-three battalions<sup>104</sup> with storm-troops and guns thrown against a line held by little over four—16,000 men against less than 4,000—had only reached their objective at one point and been quickly repelled with nearly double the casualties of the defenders. Prince Rupprecht makes no mention of the consoling counter-claim of so many defeated generals, put forward by Moser, that the attack “fulfilled its aim—to force the enemy to bring up strong reserves”; nor is there any sign that the German higher command ever imagined that it would relieve the pressure of the Battle of Arras. Actually, it did not cause any movement of reserves outside the I Anzac Corps, or indeed—except for a temporary transfer of two battalions<sup>105</sup> in the back area—outside the two front-line divisions. Even in the 1st Division, the only one seriously affected, not more than two battalions<sup>106</sup> of the reserve brigade were moved up to Beaumetz and Morchies, and neither was needed, the German attack being defeated by the front-line brigades with their own reserves. It is true that this raid induced not only I Anzac, but the whole Fifth Army, to devote more attention and labour to the early completion of wire-entanglements for all their defence lines; but it caused no delay in operations and had no material effect whatever on the plans for the Bullecourt offensive in which, when their turn came, even the 11th and 12th Battalions, which had been most heavily pressed on April 15th, played an important and successful part.

Whether the operation cheered the German troops as much as von Moser, after visiting their hospitals, imagined may be doubted; but the incursion into the Australian batteries and bivouacs would unquestionably give a different colour to their otherwise depressing experiences. The captured Germans complained somewhat bitterly that they had been launched into the fight at a few hours' notice, and without reconnoitring the ground, and this circumstance, evidently referred to in the divisional reports, is noted by Crown Prince Rupprecht. General von Moser states that, as the operation furnished the latest example of a German major operation on the

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<sup>104</sup> Only this number seems to have been actually engaged.

<sup>105</sup> The 29th and 30th (5th Division), which were sent from near Bapaume to Beaumetz and Morchies respectively.

<sup>106</sup> The 7th and 8th (2nd Brigade), from Villers-au-Flos, near Bapaume.



Western Front, reports were carefully collated and embodied in a memorandum "which was again expanded in numerous reprints." The lessons learned may not have been without influence on the more famous German attacks of November 1917 and March 1918, to which in some respects the Lagnicourt operation bears interesting resemblances. But what mainly impressed the Germans at this time was the effect of the Lewis guns, "cleverly emplaced and bravely fought." Many accounts appear to have mentioned them and pointed to the great need for a light machine-gun in the German army—a weapon with which it was then just beginning to be supplied.<sup>167</sup>

It must be admitted that the Australians in this action were favoured by several fortunate chances—in particular, by the late arrival of the III/Lehr and the short-shooting in the 4th Ersatz Division. If those accidents had not occurred, and if von Moser, like his subordinate of the 2nd Guard Reserve Division, had entirely dispensed with the futile bombardment covering the attack, the enormous front of the 1st Australian Division, with its weak outposts, mostly undefended by wire, must have been overrun to a much greater extent than actually happened. Responsibility for the failure of the 12th Battalion to fire S.O.S. flares is difficult to place, the facts being in dispute; but for the lack of wire the staff of the 1st Australian Division is at least *prima facie* responsible.<sup>168</sup> The extraordinary success of the defence was due partly to the toughness of the troops and partly to the

<sup>167</sup> General von Moser states, as another valuable result of the attack: "It is worth while that we have at last once again captured 'English' artillerymen who give us important information concerning the English guns and the effect of our artillery." Some of the captured Australian artillerymen stated, on their return to England after the war, that the Germans had given them drink and cigarettes, and tried to obtain information from them, but without success. Someone's tongue, however, must have been loosened.

<sup>168</sup> Although the barrage called down by an S.O.S. signal would not have defeated the attack, the supporting artillery being too weak, yet the firing of the signal in front of Lagnicourt would have alarmed the artillery and the staff. The absence of barbed-wire in front of the outposts may indicate a defect in control or supervision. It is true that the positions might not have been saved by such slender entanglements as could have been erected in a single night, and that a short "apron" in front of a small post tended to betray its position. Nevertheless, definite results on this as on other occasions prove that commanders were fully justified in insisting that posts should be wired, and, in spite of the temporary concentration of transport and labour on road and railway work and other needs of Gough's offensive, some wire could probably have been supplied on April 14 and the troops forced to use it. General Rosenthal in his report said: "The Australian troops are notoriously careless about wire." It may, however, be questioned whether they were more so than other British troops; and, in any case, the responsibility was on the staff to see that any carelessness in that respect was overcome by stricter supervision. The German raid, like that of March 2 at Le Barque (p. 109), brought the subject into prominence, and was followed by hurried measures to wire the posts.

system of defence in depth on which Birdwood and White, following the orders of Haig and Gough, had continuously insisted since the German withdrawal commenced. Rigid adherence to this system had been enjoined by Haig with the deliberate intention of foiling any powerful counter-stroke such as Ludendorff, Hindenburg, and the Crown Prince Rupprecht had, as is now known, been itching to deliver. Had that formidable thrust been made,<sup>169</sup> it would almost certainly have broken its force, as did this lesser attempt, against the outlying rocks of the outposts, and such currents as swirled past them would have been held by the deep relays of reserves. The main position of the I Anzac Corps was probably never less penetrable. Nevertheless no troops could hold so extended a line without danger of losing their forward zone, and it is evident that insufficient care was taken to guard the advanced artillery.

I have been compelled (wrote Birdwood afterwards) to advance a considerable number of guns to what is undoubtedly dangerous proximity to the German trenches. . . .

There is no sign, however, that before April 15th this danger was realised. The special escorts, which had been provided for the forward artillery during the advance from Bapaume, were no longer being furnished, there being a tendency, now that the front line was practically stationary, to regard these guns as secure. It had not occurred to the staffs of the corps, the divisions, or even of the artillery itself to suggest the simple precaution of stationing a company of infantry to protect the Lagnicourt guns.<sup>170</sup> The rashness of artillery commanders in allowing rifles to be left at the waggon-lines placed the batteries in the ignominious position of being without a weapon with which to defend themselves.<sup>171</sup> Seventy rifles<sup>172</sup> might not have saved the 2nd A.F.A. Brigade, but they would have kept the enemy from the 1st Brigade, and possibly prevented the destruction of any guns.

Through the abandonment of the Lagnicourt guns, the field artillery incurred some displeasure, and official reports concentrate their praise upon the heavy artillery. Yet, apart

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<sup>169</sup> It was forgone because they had not the available force (*see p 172*).

<sup>170</sup> These were attached to the 2nd Division, but were stationed in the 1st Division's area. It was open to either division to suggest the necessary steps, and both were, therefore, responsible.

<sup>171</sup> The guns themselves could not be fired for fear of hitting their own infantry.

<sup>172</sup> That is, ten for each of the seven batteries in the valley.

from the neglect to bring up rifles and the panicky action of a few individuals—an incident inseparable from such a withdrawal in the dark—it is hard to see how the field artillery could have done better. The effective barrage thrown on the enemy at day-break was entirely its work, and some of the crews took great risk in bringing their guns into the open. The action of the 43rd Battery added something even to the great tradition of the service. The day was one of intense activity for the whole artillery; the amount of ammunition spent—21,315 shrapnel and 13,264 high-explosive shells by the field artillery, and 8,283 shells<sup>173</sup> (mostly 6-inch and over) by the “heavies”—had never been equalled in the I Anzac Corps.

The operation furnished a striking justification for the system of defence in depth, and the higher commanders were especially pleased with the success of the counter-attack. When all is said, however, the outstanding feature of the fight was the dependability of the 1st Division's infantry, who in their skeleton line of posts and supports—far too thin to be wisely protruded as a menace to the enemy—held up, without calling on the divisional reserves, an attack by four German divisions on a front of 13,000 yards.

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<sup>173</sup> According to the diary of the Corps ammunition park. The diary of the heavy artillery gives its total as 8,500. The figure for the field artillery includes certain amounts destroyed by explosion. The total expenditure was 43,263 shells.

## CHAPTER XI

### NIVELLE'S OFFENSIVE, AND THE "SECOND BULLECOURT" PLAN

THE attacks by the Third and First British Armies begun on April 9th at Arras and Vimy had been continued day after day, first in the keen but short-lived hope—it died after the First Battle of Bullecourt—of a break-through; later in the stubborn endeavour to attract an increasing part of the German reserve away from the front on which Nivelle was about to deliver his momentous attack. On the day after the Bullecourt fight the British a few miles to the north-west seized Héninel, Wancourt, and 2,000 yards of the Hindenburg Line, south of the Cojeul but still a mile distant from the Fifth Army's left. On the 13th at the northern end of the battlefield the Germans voluntarily withdrew from their remaining positions on Vimy Ridge. Early on the 14th the Third Army again attacked along its whole front, but after some success was thrown back by counter-attack. That evening Allenby ordered the operation to continue, but the troops were worn out. No progress was made, and on the 15th the order was cancelled. The first great effort had been prolonged until the eve of Nivelle's offensive; staffs were warned that at an early date the attack would be renewed in the form of an attempt to seize the nearer part of the triangle between the Scarpe and the Sensée.

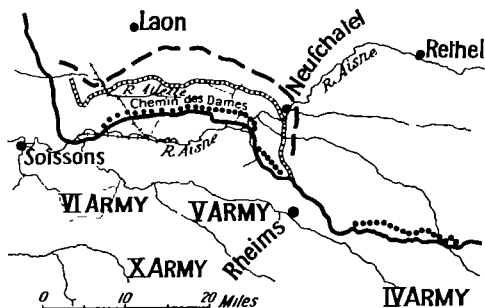
On April 16th Nivelle's offensive was launched. By the original scheme he was to have struck on the 12th, three days after the British offensive. Reference has already been made to the abrupt change in the attitude of the French Government towards the great project of their commander-in-chief. Nivelle, whom the previous Ministry had elevated especially to carry out this whirlwind stroke, and who by the enthusiastic support of that Ministry had secured the British Government's assent not only to the plan but to his own elevation over Haig and the British Army, was so mistrusted by the new Ministry that at the council of war on April 6th<sup>1</sup> he had offered to

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<sup>1</sup> Called by Painlevé, the new Minister of War, at Compiègne for discussion of Nivelle's plan (*see pp 142-3*).

resign his command. His threat had caused the ministers present to assure him of their confidence, but he knew that he did not possess it, and that, though at the conference only General Pétain had criticised his plan, several of his chief subordinates had little enthusiasm for it.<sup>2</sup>

Under such circumstances, after waiting several days for favourable weather, which in the end did not occur, Nivelle struck his great blow. Before the evening of April 16th he must have known that his plan of sudden break-through could not succeed. The Fifth and Sixth French Armies under Mazel and Mangin had seized the foremost German line, the right of the Fifth had penetrated a mile and a half, and 10,000 prisoners had been captured. But German machine-guns — largely of the new light-weight pattern—had brought the left and centre of the attack to a standstill on the edge of the heights near Braye,



*The objectives to be attained by the main attack in six and eight hours are shown respectively by laddered and broken lines, the actual attainment on April 16 and 17 by dotted lines.*

Vauclerc, and Craonne. The large fleet of French tanks, which was to assist in the rupture, was shattered, its wrecks ablaze everywhere;<sup>3</sup> and the Tenth Army (Duchesne) was still vainly awaiting the order to advance through the intended gap in the enemy line. The great time-table had utterly broken down.

Nivelle's plan—as was soon realised by himself, and as Haig had previously suspected—had long since been discovered by the Germans. So widespread in France had been the gossip concerning it, that it would be surprising if information did not reach the German staff through its spy system as well as from aeroplane observation of the preparations. By

<sup>2</sup> On April 5 Nivelle had actually felt himself reduced to the necessity of addressing to his generals a memorandum arguing that to strike at once was worth more than to wait two months for Haig's projected offensive at Ypres. *L'Offensive de 1917*, pp 114-17, by Commandant de Civrieux.

<sup>3</sup> Of the 132 employed by the Fifth French Army, 57 were destroyed and 64 "stuck in the mud, broke down, or were abandoned." Palat, *Vol. XII*, p. 257.

whatever medium, on or about March 15th the German command was informed of the imminence of a great French attack between Soissons and La Fère; and (according to Crown Prince Rupprecht)<sup>4</sup> the preparations made for its reception were without any previous parallel on the German side. The German command on the Aisne was reorganised. The Seventh Army, which would meet the main thrust, was reinforced with troops and guns. The trusted commander of the First Army, General Fritz von Below, who had faced the British from early in the Somme battle until the fighting at the Hindenburg Line, was transferred with his staff to take over a sector of the threatened front. To ensure unity of command, the whole probable front of attack was included in the group of armies of the German Crown Prince. As the date approached, the Germans learnt many details of the plan. On March 5th, in a lucky raid, they captured a copy of Joffre's famous instruction of December 16th setting forth the general methods for the offensive,<sup>5</sup> and on April 13th they found on the body of a dead despatch-rider a copy of the order for the attack to be made by the Fifth French Army on Brimont at 3 a.m. on April 16th.

On the second day of the great offensive, April 17th, the Fourth French Army took up its rôle, attacking east of Rheims, and, despite considerable success, fell far short of the desired attainment. The enemy this day counter-attacked and threw back the other armies from some of the advanced positions gained on the 16th; and Nivelle, recognising that his original plan of swift break-through had failed, cancelled it and substituted orders aiming at less far-reaching objectives. The attack of the Sixth Army (Mangin), which he believed to be most stubbornly opposed, was stopped, and the Fifth (Mazel) was now to attack north-westwards instead of northwards. For three more days the effort continued—with success which was infinitesimal, if measured by the original intentions, although not so discouraging if gauged by the standards of the First Battle of the Somme. It was to "Somme tactics" that Nivelle now obviously intended to revert, but he had committed himself far too deeply: such catchwords as "No more

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<sup>4</sup> *Mein Kriegstagebuch*, Vol. 2, p. 109.

<sup>5</sup> *See* p. 10.

Somme!" "Success within 48 hours or cessation of the offensive!" were far too definite to be retracted.<sup>6</sup>

But there also fought against Nivelle a psychological factor much more important than his personal pledges. Any leader who asks his followers to strain their bodies and wills to an effort beyond their power, and so leads them to failure, must expect reaction. The French Army—as Pétain knew and Haig suspected—was not in 1917 equal to the overwhelming effort which Nivelle demanded. When he altered Joffre's sober plan of co-operation with the British into one of spectacular action by the French, he set the already dwindling and overburdened French Army to a task beyond its power. Like the Germans in March 1918, the French fighting forces, despite the misgivings of some of their leaders, flung themselves into this battle with a feverish enthusiasm, buoyed up with high hopes and promises, and the failure of the plans sent them headlong to dejection. To the bitter disappointment of the French people was added a clamour of the soldiers directed especially against Mangin, who since the glowing successes at Verdun had been Nivelle's most spirited fighting leader. It was widely stated, and believed, that the loss in the first few days reached 200,000. The true loss, though very great, amounted only to about half this total,<sup>7</sup> but these and similar rumours galvanised into activity not only all political critics of Nivelle, but all the pacifist and defeatist elements in France.

In such a reaction Nivelle was, from the first, doomed. The British representative at his headquarters, Lieutenant-General Sir Henry Wilson, who enjoyed his confidence and that of other French leaders, learnt by April 17th the opinion of Foch, that Nivelle would be superseded—probably by Pétain, who would favour a policy of remaining on the defensive until the Americans arrived.

There had indeed been a profound alteration in circumstances since the Chantilly plan<sup>8</sup> and Nivelle's

<sup>6</sup> The catchwords were not Nivelle's, but the policy was. In *Letters to a Friend*, p. 174, Ribot says that on this point Nivelle's "language was of the greatest possible clearness."

<sup>7</sup> Controversy has raged over these figures. The generally accepted official statement quoted by Ribot and by Mangin gives the loss between April 16 and 25 as killed, 15,000; wounded, 60,000; "missing," 20,500; total, 95,500. Painlevé gives the figures, corrected (as was always necessary) by later official checking, as: killed and died of wounds, 33,000 to 34,000; wounded, about 85,000; as there were also 4,000 prisoners, the total loss would be about 122,000.

<sup>8</sup> The scheme of concerted offensives by the Allies for 1917 (see p. 1).

modification of it had been agreed upon. One great ally might be unable to deliver its stroke—might even retire from the struggle. In the nine days March 8th-16th the governing power in Russia had been overthrown by revolution. In this movement the Russian people probably had the sympathy of every civilised nation—certainly of the mass of British and Americans; but among the Allies that feeling was naturally accompanied by anxious speculation as to whether the assistance of the Russian Armies would be maintained or withdrawn. In spite of an encouraging manifesto issued on April 9th by the Provisional Russian Government,<sup>9</sup> in agreement with the Petrograd Soviet, it was far from certain that Russia would carry out her part in the Chantilly plan. As for the offensive by Italy, the Italians now feared a concentration of German troops and an offensive against themselves. The French part in the concerted attack was not achieving the results that Nivelle had promised. On the other hand—perhaps most important of the changed conditions—the United States was in the war. If it was possible to wait securely for a year or more until the armies of America began to tell, victory was certain.

No British leader, however, believed that it would be possible to wait so long; and Haig was rendered highly anxious by the rumours of an imminent abandonment of the French offensive. In his opinion the only sure plan was for Great Britain and France to maintain the concerted pressure, urging Italy and Russia to play their part as fully as they could.<sup>10</sup> The Germans could not indefinitely stand the resulting strain, whereas, if the pressure was relaxed, they would at once strike at Russia, Italy, or even France, with a view of putting them out of the war. Lloyd George was, at this juncture, about to accompany the French Premier (Ribot) to Italy in order to urge the need for launching the Italian offensive. The British War Office therefore hurriedly

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<sup>9</sup> Under the leadership of Prince Lvov. Kerensky was a member, but not yet leader.

<sup>10</sup> Of the Allies' offensives previously arranged for, those of Italy and Russia had not yet taken place. When the French offensive had begun, Nivelle received a letter from Cadorna, the Italian Commander-in-Chief, saying that there was no sign of a hostile concentration against Italy, but that he himself did not propose to attack until the British and French offensives had used up all the German reserves. This stirred Nivelle into a strong reply, urging that Italy should take the offensive, as agreed, as soon as possible. Nivelle at the same time wrote a similar letter to the headquarters of Alexeieff, the Russian Commander-in-Chief.



arranged that a memorandum containing Haig's views should be placed in the Prime Minister's hands on his arrival in Paris on April 20th, before he met the French Ministers.

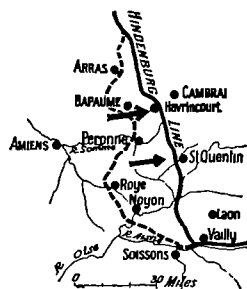
The British Prime Minister, who had been so attracted by Nivelle's plan, was, after its failure, in deep perplexity as to the right policy for the Allies. Himself strongly averse from the expensive "wearing down" methods of the Somme, he tended to favour a policy of "knocking away Germany's props" by defensively holding the Western Front and trying to strike Turkey or Austria out of the war. But in this crisis he accepted the conclusion that, provided France would maintain her effort, the best policy was to go steadily forward with the Chantilly plan, even if it was somewhat lamed. It is possible that his distrust of Haig's judgment may have been sensibly lessened by the Nivelle fiasco. At all events he laid Haig's memorandum before Painlevé, and it was well received. The French ministers dared not, at this moment, face the situation which might be created by the discontinuance of the British offensive in France. In the depression of the French Army and nation there was becoming observable a condition of excitement which any relaxation of the British effort might greatly intensify. Painlevé and Ribot were not yet ready to contemplate, as they did later, the transfer of the main French and British offensive to the Italian front. Painlevé therefore agreed with Lloyd George that Nivelle's offensive should continue for another fortnight, when the situation would again be reviewed.

Nivelle met Haig at Amiens on April 24th and agreed on a plan for a most formidable "wearing-down" offensive, in which, while the French continued to press on the Aisne front and the British at Arras, they should also combine in a great attack near their point of junction, the French at St. Quentin, and Rawlinson's (Fourth) Army and the right of Gough's near Havrincourt.<sup>11</sup> Haig undertook that, provided the French would carry out this scheme in a determined manner, he would do the same, even drawing upon the accumulation of divisions that were being carefully saved for his projected offensive in Flanders, and, if necessary, abandoning that cherished project. He explained this plan to his army

<sup>11</sup> The British attack would take place about the right boundary of the I Anzac Corps.

commanders at Doullens on April 25th, and indicated that the Havrincourt offensive would be launched about May 25th. Gough and Rawlinson were to make their plans immediately—the I Anzac Corps, after one of its divisions had carried through the renewed attack near Bullecourt, was to be taken out<sup>12</sup> for a short rest and then moved behind the left of the Fourth Army for employment in this offensive.

But at the time when these plans were being made Haig was fully aware that they might never be carried out. The British War Cabinet, itself warned by the ambassador in Paris, Lord Bertie, had informed him that Nivelle was likely to be superseded by Pétain.



Meanwhile the British Army was continuing at Arras its effort to wear down the German reserves. Haig, who had never yet been prepared to commit the whole strength of his army unreservedly to this offensive, maintained for the present the same cautious policy: knowing that the French might remain inactive and so leave him to undertake almost unaided the offensive in Flanders, he still retained "up his sleeve" the reserves for that purpose. Although each thrust at Arras was made on a wide front, he allowed Allenby comparatively few fresh troops with which to make them. The general attack, dropped on April 15th, was resumed on the 23rd. It was at first intended that the Fifth Army should take part in that day's operations, but the order for this was cancelled on April 18th, it being then considered that the Fifth Army's attack would have greater effect when the Third was more advanced. On the 23rd nine British divisions attacked on a front of nine miles, the First Army capturing Gavrelle and the Third Guémappe. But, notwithstanding the width of the front and the numbers of troops employed, this and the later attacks at Arras were not the great after-strokes that the Germans expected and feared.

**The Arras effort continued**

<sup>12</sup> It would hand over its front to the V Corps.

The first attack at Arras was one of the most effective ever delivered against the Germans on the Western Front. It had been expected and, from March 19th, carefully prepared for with reinforcements and supplies. The new system of defence in greater depth, the first vital reform instituted by Ludendorff on his arrival at the Western Front, was in operation. Under it the front line was no longer to be manned by a strong garrison, but was to be lightly held by troops disposed in depth; the front was to be protected not by the front-line troops and their immediate supports holding on "at all costs," but by the throwing in of strong reserves, specially retained beyond the reach of the first hostile attack. These would strike the enemy attack just as it ended, and drive it back, recapturing the original positions. This new system had not only been explained in a booklet, *The Defensive Battle*,<sup>13</sup> but had been pumped into senior officers and staff by training at special schools at Valenciennes and Sedan. The Sixth German Army, on which the British blow fell, had disposed itself in accordance with these principles; but the application of them in this instance failed, partly because the British bombardment smashed the second line as well as the first (and the German reserves had not been kept far enough in rear), partly because the British attacked before they were expected to do so, the artillery preparation being shorter than on the Somme and the infantry being well concealed, before the attack, in the ancient tunnels of Arras.<sup>14</sup>

Under these conditions the German defensive system had temporarily broken down, and the confidence of the German command was for a moment shaken. "The consequences," writes Ludendorff, "of a break through of 12 to 15 kilometres wide and 6 or more kilometres deep are not easy to meet."<sup>15</sup> The following days were critical. "Colossal efforts" were required. The battle "was swallowing up a liberal supply of reserves and material" when the French attacked, and "if the Russian successes of July had occurred in April and May, I do not see . . . how G.H.Q. could have mastered the situation." As it was, "in spite of the seriousness of our

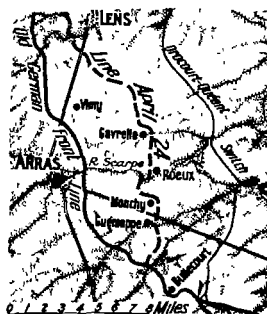
<sup>13</sup> Supplemented by a *Manual for the Training of Infantry in War*, by General Fritz von Below and his staff

<sup>14</sup> The German artillery was not yet using mustard gas, with which it might have drenched the town and rendered it impossible for troops to assemble there

<sup>15</sup> *My War Memories*, Vol. II, p. 421.

position . . . , the absence of any Russian attacks . . . prevented a general crisis . . . such as we had experienced in September 1916."

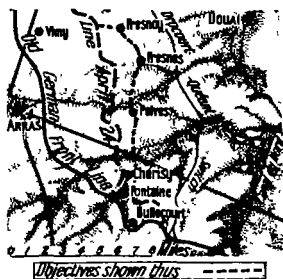
The later British attacks at Arras, Ludendorff remarks, were "not really on a grand scale." The truth is that, on the one hand, Haig did not commit to them his full strength: Allenby had to fight largely with battle-worn troops. On the other hand the shock of the Arras offensive had forced the Germans to a more effective practice of their new system.<sup>16</sup> In subsequent advances at Arras the tired British troops, just as they began to dig in on the positions captured, were attacked by fresh German forces brought up from the rear, and in almost all cases were thrown back. Thus on April 23rd the VI Corps, which had captured Guémappe, was counter-attacked about noon and forced to retire. On an order from Allenby that the ground must be retaken "at all costs," the British renewed their attack that night, and the Germans eventually withdrew; some 2,250 prisoners were taken, but the British suffered 16,000 casualties and their success fell far short of the intentions. Again Allenby ordered his army to continue its effort, but countermanded the order next day. On April 28th seven divisions of the First and Third Armies, advancing in the region of their junction on a front of eight miles, captured Roeux, north of the Scarpe, but a German counter-attack flung back the Third except from a small gain east of Monchy.



Preparations were at once made for the delivery of the next stroke. It was thought that, as the right of the Third Army would now be attacking Fontaine-les-Croisilles, slightly over a mile from the Fifth Army's left, and Chérisy, a little farther north, the Fifth Army could usefully join in. G.H.Q. suggested certain preliminary minor operations, but Allenby set his face against local offensives, arguing that it would be less costly to wait and advance on a wide front. The projected thrust was indeed to be on a front wider than that of any

<sup>16</sup> The Crown Prince Rupprecht had been stung by a letter of reprimand from Ludendorff to his subordinate, General von Falkenhause, the commander of the Sixth Army, who on April 23 was replaced by General Otto von Below.

such operation ever before undertaken by the British Army—fourteen divisions attacking on a front of sixteen miles.<sup>17</sup> The objectives, which are shown in the marginal sketch, were fairly deep, considering that no reserves were available. On their being attained, patrols would endeavour to reach a further line; if they succeeded in this, it seemed almost certain that the enemy must fall back on his next line, the Drocourt-Quéant switch,<sup>18</sup> and the Third Army would therefore afterwards advance by night towards that line, using the bayonet alone, and endeavouring to disorganise the enemy and to capture his guns. On the extreme right of the first great attack Gough would repeat his attempt to thrust through the Hindenburg Line about Bullecourt. As Nivelle's Fifth and Sixth Armies were resuming their offensive on May 4th, it was decided to launch the British attack on the 3rd.



Vital differences distinguished the plan of Gough's present attack from that of April 11th. First, the Australian division, though still thrown into the deep re-entrant east of Bullecourt, and charged with the attainment of an extraordinarily difficult objective beyond Riencourt, would no longer be advancing alone. Not only was the 62nd Division to advance as deeply, through and beyond Bullecourt, but the attack would be continuous leftwards along the whole British front to Vimy Ridge. Second, and even more important, the attack would not this time be made without the preliminary assistance of artillery, but with artillery support comparable to that of the main British offensives. For this purpose the First and Third Armies were on April 15th ordered to send to the I Anzac Corps twelve batteries of heavy artillery, and the V Corps was similarly strengthened. Before the end of April the heavy artillery of I Anzac

<sup>17</sup> In the First Battle of the Somme, 1 July, 1916, 13 divisions had struck on a front of 15½ miles. At Arras on April 9 14 struck on a front of 14½ miles. But in each case they were fresh divisions, with strong reserves behind them.

<sup>18</sup> The German "Wotan" Line.

had grown from 15 to 31 batteries.<sup>19</sup> The field artillery supporting the division destined for the attack had also slightly increased, but only as a result of an extension of the divisional sector: after the German stroke at Lagnicourt, the 2nd Division, as well as controlling the narrow front of the coming attack, had been made responsible for the Lagnicourt sector farther south, previously part of the 1st Division's extensive front. To hold it a brigade (the 2nd) was lent by the 1st Division, and this brigade was supported by the 14th Brigade of Australian Field Artillery which now formed a fourth group under the 2nd Division's control.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> The heavy artillery attached to I Anzac now comprised five groups:

2nd H.A.G. (behind Vaulx- Vraucourt and Vraucourt dis- tillery).	9th H.A.G. (behind Vaulx- Vraucourt).	14th H.A.G. (about Mari- court Wood, Morchies, and Beugny).	23rd H.A.G. (about Mari- court Wood, Morchies, Beugny, and Beaumontz).	44th H.A.G. (behind Beau- metz and at Vélú)
30th Siege (8-in. hows.)	13th Siege (9.2-in. hows.)	194th Siege (8-in. hows.)	24th Siege (6-in. hows.)	163rd Siege (6-in. hows.)
42nd Siege (9.2-in. hows.)	33rd Siege (8-in. hows.)	34th Siege (9.2-in. hows.)	78th Siege (8-in. hows.)	276th Siege (6-in. hows.)
23rd Siege (6-in. hows.)	122nd Heavy (60-pdr. guns)	88th Siege (6-in. hows.)	48th Siege (9.2-in. hows.)	31st Heavy (60-pdr. guns)
115th Siege (6-in. hows.)	171 Warwick Heavy	140th Siege (6-in. hows.)	264th Siege (9.2-in. hows.)	142nd Heavy (60-pdr. guns)
144th Siege (6-in. hows.)	(60-pdr. guns)		26th Heavy (60-pdr. guns)	189th Siege (two 6-in. high velocity guns)
232nd Siege (6-in. hows.)	117th Heavy (60-pdr. guns)		116th Heavy (60-pdr. guns)	
			35th Siege (two 6-in. high- velocity guns)	

Four more batteries, the 18th, 65th, and 243rd Siege (each comprising two 12-in. howitzers), and the 5th Royal Marine Artillery Battery (one 15-in. howitzer) were directly administered by the heavy artillery commander of the I Anzac Corps.

<sup>20</sup> The field artillery, under the command first of the C.R.A., 4th Division (Brigadier-General Rosenthal), and from April 21 of the C.R.A., 2nd Australian Division (Brigadier-General Johnston) thus comprised:

Behind Ecoust-Longatte. "P" Group (4th Div. Artillery, under Lieut.-Col. G. H. M. King).	Noreuil Valley. "Q" Group (2nd Div. Artillery, under Lieut.-Col. R. L. R. Rabett— after May 10, Lieut.-Col. H. W. Lloyd).	Lagnicourt Valley. "M" Group (1st Div. Artillery, under Lieut.-Col. G. I. Stevenson).	Morchies Valley. "R" Group (Part of 5th Div. Artillery, under Lieut.-Col. O. F. Phillips).
10th Brigade	4th Brigade	1st Brigade	14th Brigade.
37th Bty.	10th Bty.	1st Bty.	53rd Bty.
38th Bty.	11th Bty.	2nd Bty.	54th Bty.
39th Bty.	12th Bty.	3rd Bty.	55th Bty.
110th How. Bty.	104th How. Bty.	101st How Bty.*	114th How. Bty.
11th Brigade	5th Brigade.	2nd Brigade.	
41st Bty.	13th Bty.	4th Bty.	
42nd Bty.	14th Bty.	5th Bty.	
43rd Bty.	15th Bty.	6th Bty.	
111th How. Bty.	105th How. Bty	102nd How Bty.	
	12th (Army) Bde		
	45th Bty. (relieved on April 28 by 47th)		
	46th Bty.		

\* Behind Noreuil

From April 18th G.H.Q. increased the Fifth Army's daily allowance of shells and added a special allotment of 30,000 rounds for the sixty-pounders and 10,000 for the six-inch howitzers.

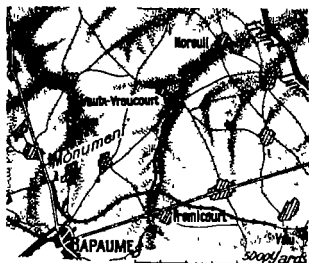
Most of the sixty-pounders and a proportion of the howitzers were daily employed in hammering, under aeroplane guidance, at the known German battery positions, while the remainder of the artillery pounded the Hindenburg Line in the sector to be attacked and three villages included in the objective. On April 18th the heavy howitzers of the V Corps concentrated on Bullecourt and the sugar factory beyond it. On the 20th they destroyed the last standing buildings in the village. Farther back, Hendecourt and Riencourt became clusters of rickety ruins edged by frayed trees; Bullecourt, placed like a bastion in the Hindenburg Line, subsided into a desolation of rubbish heaps. The greater part of the wire entanglements was gradually blown into shreds. On a suggestion from the higher staffs, openings were also blown in the wire by sending forward parties to thrust beneath it Bangalore torpedoes (long tubes filled with ammonal, whose explosion blew lanes through the entanglement). The 2nd Australian Division attempted this three times with varying success.<sup>21</sup> Portions of the entanglements were thus completely destroyed; yet so extensive were they and so difficult in some places to observe that, even at the end of April, parts were reported as almost intact, and others though penetrable as furnishing a definite obstacle.

The opening of this powerful artillery-fire against the Hindenburg Line only a month after the Germans had fallen back upon it had not been accomplished without much labour and organisation in the reconstruction of the destroyed roads and railways, which the Germans had endeavoured to render unemployable for many months.<sup>22</sup> For example, the 5th

<sup>21</sup> Some tubes had been exploded by the 62nd Division at Bullecourt about the night of April 14. The 2nd Australian Division on the night of the 18th managed to explode three out of eight tubes at various points beneath the belt of wire west of the Noreuil-Riencourt road (called the "Central Road" in the description of the 4th Division's attack), and six in the thick triangular entanglement just east of it. On April 24 the 2nd Division reported that it had, at 2.15 a.m., successfully fired fourteen tubes. On the night of the 26th the 7th Brigade made another attempt, but the Germans, who now were probably expecting such enterprises, opened with machine-guns and rifles, and only six tubes were set off. The higher staffs almost invariably attributed to these enterprises more effect than they actually attained. Brigadier-General Wisdom reported the last of them as "not very successful."

<sup>22</sup> For the German expectations, see foot-note at p. 262.

Pioneers (5th Australian Division), prolonging the light railway which on April 20th was delivering supplies at Frémicourt, had by April 30th relaid the rails as far as Vaulx-Vraucourt. A southern extension of the same line was then approaching Vêlu on its way to Hermies, and a third light railway had reached the "Monument," a supply centre north of Bapaume. On May 1st the rations for the 2nd Division were brought by the I Anzac Light Railways to Vaulx-Vraucourt, and the 2nd Division's horse-transport was thus set free for carrying engineer stores, material for roads, and other supplies.



Not only the roads and railways, but the whole country beyond Bapaume was being rehabilitated for occupation by troops and for operations. Dugouts for safe accommodation of supporting units,<sup>23</sup> hutments and camps to offer the lodging that the Germans had destroyed in the villages,<sup>24</sup> water-supply, dry "standings" for horses, were being provided at every convenient point. Hundreds of men were employed in loading and unloading broad and narrow gauge trains and fleets of motor lorries; others in bringing up material (including railway and tramway tracks) from the old Somme battlefield; others in carrying and checking stores in and out at the supply and ammunition dumps. The mere salvaging of abandoned gear and ammunition—part of the vast waste inevitable through battle, movement, and the recklessness of soldiers—occupied much of the time of units camped in the back areas. The use of salvaged material had lately been urged not merely from reasons of economy, but to reduce the call on British ships transporting supplies to France. One or two instances of reckless waste are recorded against Australian

<sup>23</sup> Seventeen dugouts were being made for the supports in the 2nd Division's area, chiefly near Lagnicourt, one in Lagnicourt Valley having galleries 240 feet long, and one near Noreuil a gallery of 120 feet.

<sup>24</sup> At the end of April the 2nd Division had in its reserve area 5 battalions in dugouts, trench-shelters, or niches in road-banks, and 6½ in tents and shelters about Favreuil and Biefvillers.



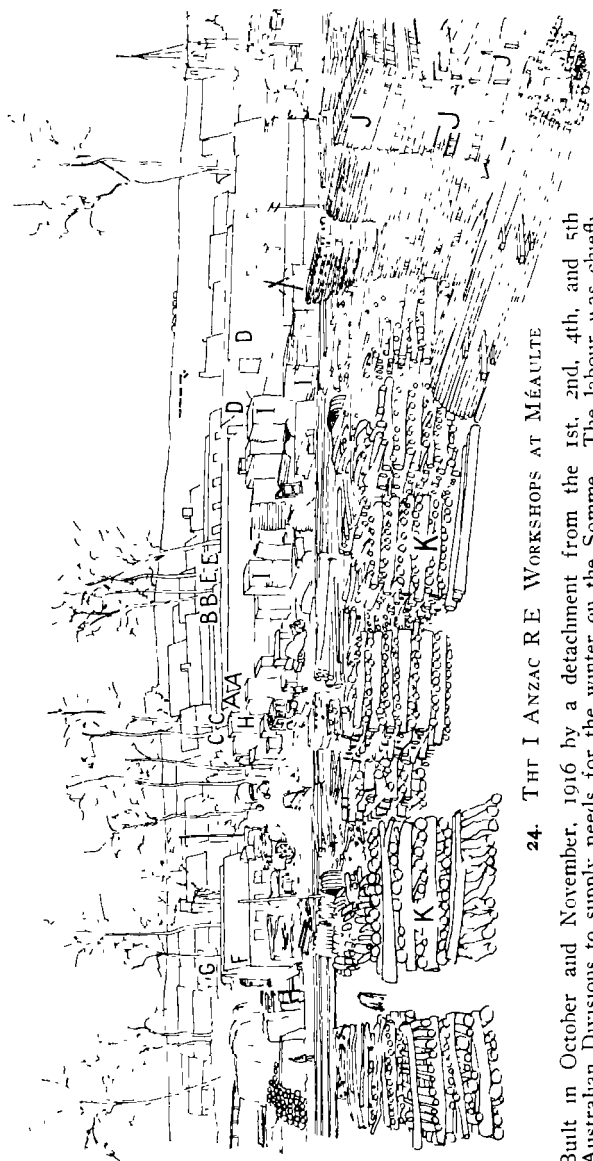


23 THE 4TH PIONEER BATTALION SHIFTING ITS CAMP TO FRÉMICOULT

The railway is the light line along the Le Sars-Bapaume road

*Just. War Memorial Official Photo No. E.469*

*10 June p. 416*



24. THE I ANZAC RE WORKSHOPS AT MÉAULTE

Built in October and November, 1916 by a detachment from the 1st, 2nd, 4th, and 5th Australian Divisions to supply needs for the winter on the Somme. The labour was chiefly that of 200-300 German prisoners, working under Australian supervision but men from British 'army troops' companies, R.E., were also attached. Timber was felled locally. The saw mill, operated entirely by Australians, turned out over 1,000,000 feet, run from logs and scantlings, per month "A"—carpenters' shops, for making boards, revetting panels, A frames, huts, etc. "B"—painters' shop "C"—museum containing one sample of each article made. "D"—sawmill. "E"—blacksmith's shop "F"—store and office "G"—coal briquette factory, in which the saw-dust from the mill was utilised. "H"—stacks of "Greenlees Hut" sections "I"—stacks of 9-in. by 3-in. by 10-ft. planks sawn in the mill. "J"—stacks of duckboards. "K"—stacks of pit-props.

Sketch by Lieut G. Smith, O.C. Aust Corps R.E. Workshop Detachment

To face p. 417.

units<sup>25</sup> and possibly justified their reputation for carelessness beyond the ordinary. But it is also interesting to note that in energetic salvage work in the Fifth Army the Australians (according to British records) easily led the way, as they did in the economical use of timber and of labour by manufacturing a great part of their engineer stores at their own corps workshops at Méaulte.<sup>26</sup>

One result of the work of rehabilitating the destroyed area was that the Anzac Corps staff, already abnormally large,<sup>27</sup> became swollen to a size far beyond any that it had previously attained;<sup>28</sup> and the troops controlled by it, apart from the 1st, 2nd, 4th, and 5th Australian and 11th British Divisions, and five groups of British heavy artillery (thirty batteries), included the following:—

*Administered by I Anzac Corps.*

I Anzac H.Q.	I Anzac Signal Coy.
I Anzac Heavy Arty. H.Q.	I Anzac Topographical Section.

<sup>25</sup> The most glaring case in the records—the leaving behind at Bécourt camp of 67 rifles, 152 blankets, 13,000 sandbags, etc.—was obviously due to some hitch in handing over, and not to the carelessness of the troops.

<sup>26</sup> At a conference for the prevention of waste, held at army headquarters on March 7, the responsible officer on the army staff (Major-General H. N. Sargent, D.A. & Q.M.G., Fifth Army) reported that "the Anzacs had improved tremendously in the matter of salvage." He added that their improvement (which had largely been effected by a system of competition fostered by the salvage officer of I Anzac—Major G. Maxted, of Melbourne—among the battalions) "showed what could be done in this direction." Thus the 1st Brigade, chiefly by means of carrying parties returning after taking forward supplies, etc., saved in one week: 3 Vickers machine-guns, 3 Lewis guns, 10½ miles D<sub>3</sub> and D<sub>5</sub> cable, 1,880 yards armoured cable, 8 miles D twin cable, 535 rifles, 162 sets web equipment, 50 bandoliers, 116 rum jars, 44 box respirators, 483 shovels, 288 picks, 510 Lewis gun magazines in panniers, 183 P.H. helmets, 298 boxes Mills grenades, 88 gumboots (unserviceable), 47,000 rounds S.A.A., 1,049 German hand grenades, in boxes, 500 "egg" bombs, in boxes, 2 boxes "pineapple" bombs, 3 bags Lewis gun spare parts, 112 boxes Stokes ammunition, 1 coil wire rope, 60 boots, 22 German rifles, 21 coils barbed wire, 120 Mills bombs, in bags, 150 duckboards, and several truckloads of miscellaneous gear.

Another measure to lighten the call on shipping was the securing of timber from the French forests rather than from overseas, and the avoidance of waste in the use made of it. Concerning this matter, the same officer pointed out at the conference that the I Anzac Corps was supplying from local sources nearly a third of the timber that it required, and was further avoiding waste by cutting and manufacturing the timber at its own workshops at Méaulte near Albert (*see plate opposite*)—thus showing "what energy and initiative can accomplish." The senior officers of engineers present endorsed this. "The Anzac Corps secured great economy by manufacturing almost everything at their workshops instead of allowing the material to go up in bulk to their divisions . . . an excellent system" (The workshops were at this time manned by skilled officers and men detached from the engineers, pioneers, infantry, and other branches, as well as by a company of skilled German prisoners.) At a further meeting of G.H.Q. and Third Army representatives on June 19, Major Maxted was asked to address the conference on the subject of salvage organisation, with reference to the pressing problem of cleaning up the battlefield of the Somme.

<sup>27</sup> By reason of the attachment of a small branch dealing with "A.I.F." matters, as well as those concerning the corps.

<sup>28</sup> At the beginning of May 1917 the actual staff comprised 70 officers and several hundreds of other ranks.

18th Motor Airline Section.  
 "AM," "GQ," "MM," "SD,"  
 "SS," and "WW" Cable Sec-  
 tions.  
 13th Light Horse Regt.  
 I Anzac Cyclist Bn.  
 I Anzac Entrenching Bn.  
 I Anzac Ammun. Park.  
 1st, 2nd, and 4th Aust. Ammun.  
 Sub-Parks.  
 5th, 29th, and 62nd Ammun. Sub-  
 Parks.  
 I Anzac Siege Park.  
 I Anzac Supply Col.  
 1st Aust. Div. Supply Col.  
 5th, 6th, 20th, 48th, and 56th  
 Supply Cols.  
 I Anzac Corps Troops Supply  
 Col.  
 I Anzac Reinforcement Camp.  
 I Anzac Engineer Workshops.  
 I Anzac Armourers Workshop.  
 I Anzac Mobile Vet. Detach.  
 1st Aust. Railway Supply Detach.  
 I Anzac Light Railways.  
 I Anzac Field Punishment Com-  
 pound.  
 I Anzac Salvage Coy.  
 I Anzac Corps School.  
 I Anzac Arty. and T.M. Schools.  
 1st, 2nd, 4th, and 5th Aust. Div.  
 Inf. Schools.  
 1st, 2nd, 4th, and 5th Aust. Div.  
 Gas Schools.  
 3rd and 12th A.F.A. Brigades.  
 I Anzac Wireless Section.  
 I Anzac Pigeon Lofts.  
 3rd and 4th Squadrons, R.F.C.  
 5th Balloon Wing.  
 13th and 17th Balloon Coys.  
 354th E. & M. Coy.  
 5th Field Survey Coy.  
 134th, 138th, 148th, 149th, 230th,  
 272nd, and 577th A.T. Coys., R.E.  
 2nd Royal Anglesey Coy., R.E.  
 4th Reinforcement Coy., R.E.

*Rationed by I Anzac Corps.*

7th Squadron, R.F.C.  
 19th Balloon Coy.  
 309th and 315th Road Construc-  
 tion Coys.  
 "D" Special Coy., R.E.  
 Destremont Farm Mobile Loft.  
 20th and 34th Labour Bns.  
 1st, 8th, 9th, and 25th Labour  
 Coys.

3rd Water Boring Section.  
 1st Special Coy., R.E.  
 "H" and "G" Special Coys., R.E.  
 2nd and 17th Light Rly. Coys.  
 2nd, 11th, 12th, and 24th Labour  
 Bns.  
 "B" Coy., 9th Labour Bn.  
 2nd, 5th, 14th, 18th, 26th, 27th,  
 28th, 29th, 36th, 58th, 59th, 79th,  
 101st, 102nd, 132nd, 133rd,  
 152nd, 153rd, 160th, and 167th  
 Labour Coys.  
 5th, 24th, and 29th Light Ord-  
 nance Mobile Workshops.  
 2nd and 15th Medium Ordnance  
 Workshops.  
 "S" and "Q" Anti-Aircraft  
 Btys.  
 26th and 27th Motor Amb. Con-  
 voys.  
 "H" Sec., 5th Graves Reg. Unit.  
 3rd Aust., 1/1st S. Midland, and  
 3rd and 45th British C.C. Stns.  
 15th Mobile Hygiene Laboratory.  
 11th Sanitary Section.  
 13th Bacteriological Laboratory.  
 2nd, 7th, 12th, and 19th Prisoner  
 of War Coys.  
 2nd and 4th Canadian Rly.  
 Troops.  
 3rd Bn., Portuguese Rly. Con-  
 struction Troops.  
 304th, 305th, 312th, and 313th  
 Road Construction Coys.  
 7th and 8th Pontoon Parks.  
 Special Med. Operating Centre.  
 5th, 28th, and 33rd Wireless Sub-  
 Sections.  
 2nd Section, Water Col.  
 258th Tunnelling Coy.  
 3rd Entrenching Bn.  
 "B" Corps Siege Park.  
 14th Reserve Park.  
 No. 2 Section, 15th Res. Park.  
 4th Cav. Div. S.C. Workshop.  
 2nd P.B. Coy.

"B" Coy., South African Native  
 Labour Corps.  
 11th Manchester Regt.  
 9th C.C. Stn.  
 21st and 35th Sanitary Sections.  
 4th Anti-Aircraft Workshops.  
 114th French Territorial Inf. Regt.  
 8th, 26th, and 32nd Prisoner of  
 War Coys.

Gough had at first intended to repeat on April 15th his attempt to pierce the Hindenburg Line; when this proved impracticable,<sup>29</sup> the attack was fixed for April 20th as part of an extensive operation planned for that day. On April 18th, although the bombardment had already begun, it was decided that the Fifth Army must wait till the Third was more advanced,<sup>30</sup> and a week's postponement therefore became inevitable. The artillery was accordingly ordered to damp down its bombardment, except against sections where the wire was still uncut, or against strong-points, batteries, and similar targets. The gun-crews of the field artillery, thrust forward in the exposed valleys and sunken roads, had been strained with prolonged work and harassed by German counter-batteries.<sup>31</sup> The group commanders were therefore now allowed to withdraw for rest part of each battery—and, after the further postponement on April 24th, whole batteries—the resting crews, however, being ready to move up instantly on receipt of the word that their task was to be resumed. The 2nd Australian Division, which on April 14th had taken over with its 5th and 6th Brigades the front of the intended attack, was allowed to relieve them on April 20th by its 7th Brigade, the 5th and 6th being then withdrawn to near Bapaume for more rest and training. On the same day news began to spread that the army commander had agreed to give the

<sup>29</sup> The date, April 15, had been fixed by an order of April 12. On the 13th Birdwood wrote pointing out that the wire between O.G.1 and 2 had not been destroyed on April 11, and was very difficult to see. "I ask, therefore, that the date of the attack be not fixed until sufficient evidence is available that the preparation is complete." On the night of April 13th it was postponed until "not before the 16th."

<sup>30</sup> The postponements were even more frequent than might be inferred from these details. On April 12 the attack was ordered for the 15th. On the night of the 13th it was postponed till "not before" Monday, 16th. On April 14 it was further postponed to "not before" April 17, and next day to "not before" the 19th. On April 16 it was definitely ordered to take place on the 20th, but on the 17th was postponed until the 22nd. On the 18th orders were given for the long postponement until April 26 or 27. On April 24 the date was changed to "probably" the 28th, but later, in view of the disappointing results of the First and Third Armies' attack on April 23 and 24, it was changed to "probably" May 3. Gough's definite order to attack on May 3 was issued on April 30.

<sup>31</sup> For the first time, the German artillery appeared to be carrying out systematic counter-battery work on this front. Noreuil Valley, which the Germans knew to be lined with guns, was constantly drenched with gas-shells. The gas officer of the corps, Lieutenant H. W. Wilson (Dimboola and Middle Brighton, Vic.) reported that on the night of April 20 the Germans fired into it 3,000 lethal shells, the bombardment lasting for five hours. On the night of the 21st they shelled it for four hours with 1,000 lethal shells, and on the following night for an hour with 700, lethal and lachrymatory. Four German batteries appeared to be firing. Only five casualties were caused. On April 23 German aeroplanes flew all day over the valley, registering their batteries on to the guns there, and during the whole of the next day the valley was shelled by 4.2-inch and 5.9-inch howitzers, three pits of the 45th Battery being hit and some ammunition exploded.

Australian divisions the rest for which Birdwood had been pressing. The 11th Division, fresh from several months' training, was being put in to relieve the 1st Australian in the extensive southern sector of the line. The 4th and the infantry of the 5th were already resting. The 2nd would be retained in the line for the Bullecourt operation, but, as soon as that had been disposed of, the I Anzac Corps would be transferred to a back area for the thorough rest for which it had been looking ever since the trying winter on the Somme. On April 25th (the third "Anzac Day")<sup>32</sup> the 11th Division duly took over the southern sector, under the I Anzac command. Orders had on April 20th been received for the Anzac line to be pushed forward towards the Canal du Nord between Hermies and Havrincourt—a first preparation, although the lower staffs were not aware of this, for the Havrincourt-Flesquières attack for which Haig provisionally arranged four days later with Nivelles.<sup>33</sup>

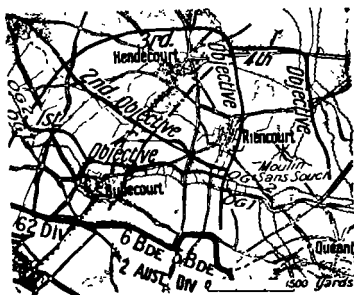
By General Gough's order, the delay in the Bullecourt offensive was turned to advantage by General Smyth and all staffs of the 2nd Australian Division, who planned and rehearsed the operation with a thoroughness for which there had never been such an opportunity in the history of the A.I.F. The army commander's plan was an elaborate one, involving, in the centre, an advance of 3,000 yards in three stages; and the project of further advance to the still more extensive "fourth objective" was resuscitated but was again abandoned.<sup>34</sup> The first objective both for the 2nd Australian Division, attacking in the re-entrant east of Bullecourt, and

<sup>32</sup> The second had been celebrated by the 1st and 2nd Divisions at Armentières and by the 4th and 5th Divisions on the Suez Canal. Anzac Day, 1917, was celebrated, where possible, by a holiday with sports or at least with dinners. The 4th Battalion, for example, in reserve, provided for each of its men on this day, from battalion funds, one bottle of beer, one packet of biscuits, two bars of chocolate, two packets of cigarettes, two sausages, and a box of matches.

<sup>33</sup> In order to obtain information concerning the Canal du Nord, which ran through No-Man's Land in this sector, Lieutenant W. E. Fitzgerald (Melbourne) at once reconnoitred it to discover the best positions for bridges. On April 24, at the request of General Birdwood, the Official Photographer of the A.I.F., Lieutenant H. F. Baldwin (Croydon, Surrey, Eng.), going out with Lieutenant H. S. Buchanan (Melbourne) of the I Anzac Topographical Section, took several photographs of the canal between the German and Australian lines. The day was hot, and Baldwin, an English press photographer, ready for any adventure, but physically small and delicate, drank some of the canal water, which is believed to have been polluted by the Germans. A few days later he became seriously ill, and, though he returned to the front for the Battle of Messines, he was soon forced to give up his work. He died a few years later.

<sup>34</sup> This was the same "fourth objective" that Gough had laid down before (see p. 266). Birdwood had strongly objected to it, and although in the orders issued by him on April 14 it had been shown on the map, General White had added the explanation that it was merely "an indication of future plans."

for the 62nd, attacking the village and the line west of it, was the two Hindenburg trenches, O.G.1 and O.G.2—this including, for the 62nd Division, the capture of Bullecourt. The second objective was the Fontaine-Moulin Sans Souci road, a further advance of 200-700 yards for the Australians, and 700-1,200 for the British. It was explained that this objective had no tactical importance, except as a starting point for the third phase of the attack—the advance on Rencourt and Hendecourt. The third objective extended into half an ellipse so as to



include the villages of Rencourt for the 2nd Australian Division and Hendecourt for the 62nd, and was itself to be attained by three sub-stages. The sum of these objectives, so far as they affected the 2nd Australian Division, did not differ greatly from the task set for the 4th Division on April 11th, except that the division's left flank, instead of being drawn back from Rencourt, was to swing up and "give a lead" to the neighbouring 62nd Division which had even farther to go. Thus, the right Australian brigade, the 5th, would advance (as previously the 4th) on the right of the Central Road,<sup>35</sup> and the 6th (as previously the 12th, but with all four battalions instead of two) on the left of it. The right of the attack would still be protected from Quéant by the crest of the Noreuil-Rencourt spur, but, as has already been mentioned, there would this time be no gap between the brigades.

The 62nd Division would be assisted by ten tanks, but after the experience of April 11th the Australians preferred to attack without them. The battalions would form up on tapes 500 yards from the German line—much closer than before—and, as on April 11th, the artillery would be careful not to increase its fire in a marked degree until the advance started. At that moment, however, a heavy barrage would be laid on the German front and support lines and a lighter one in No-Man's Land 200 yards ahead of the infantry. From then onwards

<sup>35</sup> The Noreuil-Rencourt road.

the attack would be protected by a creeping barrage which would advance at the rate, first of 100 yards in three minutes, later of 100 yards in five minutes, with halts beyond each of the objectives to protect the troops while they reorganised and consolidated.<sup>36</sup> To meet the German practice of placing machine-guns between and in rear of the trench-systems, half the field-guns during the pause at each objective would search the ground for 300 yards beyond the standing barrage.<sup>37</sup> As soon as Riencourt was taken, part of the field artillery would have to move up at once to cover the advanced front.<sup>38</sup>

The strength of the machine-gun support, which, though not specially co-ordinated with the artillery barrage, was becoming its regular accompaniment,<sup>39</sup> was beyond anything in the previous experience of the A.I.F. No less than ninety-six Vickers machine-guns would assist the 2nd Division's attack. Six would go forward with each brigade and a few would be in reserve or on duty against aircraft, but the remainder—including most of the 7th and 22nd Companies of the 2nd Division, and the 8th and 14th from the 5th Division—would provide covering fire on the flanks or over the heads of the attacking infantry.<sup>40</sup> The Anzac artillery commander's<sup>41</sup> order for the three and three-quarter hours' creeping barrage was issued chiefly in the form of

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<sup>36</sup> At the commencement the light barrage would advance in front of the infantry and catch up the standing barrage on the front line. Then, sixteen minutes after the start, the whole barrage would move a step farther, allowing the infantry to seize O.G.1. Fifteen minutes later the barrage, which would meanwhile have decreased to half its original intensity, would increase again for two minutes upon O.G.2, and then pass on, allowing the infantry to attack that trench. It would next decrease to quarter-strength while the infantry followed it to the second objective, and formed up there. After time being allowed for reorganisation here, it would increase to half-strength for the final advance. From the second objective onwards the barrage would advance at the slower rate, 100 yards in five minutes. At each of the long halts it would be intensified for two minutes before the next move, this intensification being a warning to the infantry to be ready to advance. The heavy artillery would take part in the barraging of the Hindenburg Line during the first few minutes after "zero," but thereafter would lift its fire on to the villages, the flanks, and other special points, and would provide no part of the creeping barrage.

<sup>37</sup> At the final objective the 60-pounders would do this for 600-800 yards.

<sup>38</sup> The 38th, 42nd, and 43rd Batteries were ear-marked to form, with a special ammunition column, a group (designated "X") which should move up immediately the third objective was taken.

<sup>39</sup> The Germans, having observed this, were able to distinguish between British barrages laid down as feints and those preceding actual attacks. If the barrage was not accompanied by a continuous rattle of machine-guns, it was almost certainly a feint. During May 1917 the British discovered from prisoners this weak point in their methods.

<sup>40</sup> Forty-eight of the machine-guns were disposed by the brigadiers and 48 by the 2nd Divisional staff; but the corps machine-gun officer, Lieut.-Colonel L. F. S. Hore, had the task of endeavouring to co-ordinate the whole scheme of fire.

<sup>41</sup> Brig.-General W. J. Napier.



a "ladder map,"<sup>42</sup> which for the first time was lithographed by the corps topographical section, 300 copies being issued.<sup>43</sup>

To carry out the 2nd Division's long advance, the 5th and 6th Infantry Brigades would each assemble on a two-battalion front of 680 yards. Each brigade would be two battalions deep, and drawn up in eight waves, the men in each wave being extended to two to three yards apart, with twenty-five yards separating each following wave from the one ahead. The tasks for these waves differed slightly in the two brigades. In the left (6th) brigade the first wave would take O.G.1, the second and third<sup>44</sup> O.G.2, and the fourth the second objective. The task of the leading battalions would end here, the four waves of the rear battalions, which would so far have steadily followed the attacking troops, being charged with carrying out the further stages of the advance past Riencourt. In the right (5th) brigade the third wave would seize the second objective. In accordance with the system of attack lately prescribed for the British Army, rifle-grenadiers, bombers, and Lewis gunners would advance with their platoons. The squeezing together of the successive waves at the jumping-off position was part of a recently-devised method for getting the whole attacking force ahead of the enemy's barrage, which would be certain to fall near the old front line within five or ten minutes of the alarm being given.<sup>45</sup> After passing the Hindenburg Line, however, the waves would shake out to intervals of fifty yards.

Studying the experience of the 4th Division, the staff of the 2nd recognised that the Hindenburg Line could have been held on April 11th if the ammunition-supply could have been maintained. Every effort was therefore made to ensure that supplies sufficient for holding the first objective should go forward with the troops. Each rifleman was to carry six

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<sup>42</sup> On this map the lines which formed the "ladder" indicated stages, usually of about 100 yards, in the progress of the barrage.

<sup>43</sup> During April the I Anzac Corps Topographical Section produced 24 different maps ranging from 1 in 100,000 scale to 1 in 5,000. In all, 2,267 copies were issued. The section also carried out the triangulation of the forward area, using the old French "trig." points.

<sup>44</sup> The second wave was actually to seize O.G.2, and the third wave to mop up the trench and then establish posts 150 yards in advance of it.

<sup>45</sup> It was partly for the same reason that British commanders, differing in this from the Germans, so frequently preferred that, until the moment at which the infantry advanced, the artillery should not increase its rate of fire to beyond that of the preceding period.

bombs in his tunic pockets;<sup>46</sup> bombers and rifle-grenadiers would each carry ten, and special bomb-carriers twenty-four. To outrange the German throwers, who using stick-bombs and small egg-bombs could outrange the Australians using Mills, large supplies of rifle-grenades were to be taken forward. Twelve Stokes mortars would move with the attacking waves, four in each brigade having the special duty of protecting the outer flank in the Hindenburg Line, the remainder going on to Riencourt. On reaching the Hindenburg Line, bombing parties would at once proceed to extend each flank 200 yards along the two trenches.<sup>47</sup> To protect the open right, the 7th Brigade, two of whose battalions would be holding the embankment, would dig, during the night before the attack, a string of five posts between the railway and the right of the objective in the Hindenburg Line, and would garrison them from the hour of the attack.<sup>48</sup>

On the Australian left, notwithstanding the changes in the plan, the 6th Brigade would (like the 12th in the previous battle) have to sweep past the eastern face of Bullecourt, from which the barrage would be progressively lifted as the troops approached. This was an almost unavoidable consequence of attacking in a re-entrant, and it constituted a weak point in the plan, since the Germans close on the left of the 6th Brigade, although progressively uncovered by the barrage, would not be attacked until the troops of the 62nd Division launched against the southern face of Bullecourt came up, or the 6th Brigade, after seizing its objective in the re-entrant, bombed back. It was, however, hoped to suppress the enemy during the passage of the brigade across this front by the fire of four Stokes mortars of the 15th Light Trench Mortar Battery (5th Division) and three machine-guns emplaced as shown in the marginal sketch. In case the

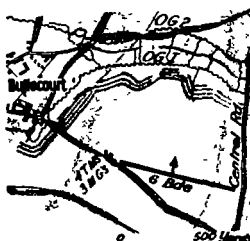
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<sup>46</sup> In the 6th Brigade each man who passed over the Hindenburg Line would leave two of his bombs there. These, and all German bombs found, would be collected into small dumps at intervals along the trenches. In case of fighting, the German bombs were to be used at the same time as the British, and not left to the end; otherwise the enemy might be able to infer from their use that the supply was nearing exhaustion.

<sup>47</sup> The right flank, which had been most strongly attacked in the previous battle, would be further assisted by two medium trench-mortars, and pioneers would construct the barricades there and fill in with earth the bays immediately to the right of them. In addition, the 8th and 14th Machine Gun Companies (5th Division) would cover the right flank with continuous fire from rear positions for at least six hours after the start.

<sup>48</sup> The 8th Light Trench Mortar Battery would protect these right-flank posts.

infantry was brought to a standstill at the second objective or after taking Riencourt, two barrages were arranged for protecting those positions; these would be laid down if the infantry sent a call for the "blue" or the "red" barrage. The attack would be launched after moon-set and before dawn, at 3.45.<sup>49</sup>



The actual rehearsals of this operation were more elaborate than those of the only other much rehearsed actions of the A.I.F. in major offensives—the Landing at Anzac and the attack at Messines. An area similar in contour to that of the forthcoming attack was selected near Favreuil, and the

<sup>49</sup> There was much discussion as to this. As not infrequently happened, the commanders of the overseas troops, trusting them to keep their direction in the dark, pressed for a commencement in the dark in order to surprise the enemy, who was certainly expecting an attack at dawn, and also to baffle the German machine-guns. The commander of the 62nd Division, fearing that his troops would lose direction, just as strongly opposed it. General Gough was understood to favour 4.20, the first break of dawn, and this was the moment chosen for launching most big attacks later in the war. Gough held that, while it was important for the assembly of the troops to be hidden by the dark, the dust raised by the barrage would provide a sufficient screen to their advance after daylight. Eventually, as at the Anzac Landing, this question practically solved itself. It would obviously be dangerous for the troops to assemble in the bright rays of the moon, which was approaching the full and would not set until 3.29. Dawn would begin to show at 4.21, and General Smyth of the 2nd Australian Division favoured a start during the intervening hour of darkness. In the end the start for the whole attack, not merely that of the Fifth Army, was fixed at 3.45.

Other provisions in the plan were that mats of expanding netting should be carried (the 6th Brigade took 50) to throw over any parts of the entanglement that might still be found uncut. Each man in the 6th Brigade would carry four empty sand-bags, each in the 5th Brigade three. Each wave would take forward its own shovels and picks (in the 5th Brigade 32 shovels and 16 picks to each wave of, roughly, 250 men). "Moppers-up" were to be specially detailed to follow each wave. Stokes mortar shells would be carried for bombing dugouts in O.G.2, but those in O.G.1 were to be cleared and used. Besides the ammunition taken by the attacking waves—and in the 6th Brigade one section in every platoon would act as carriers till they reached their objectives and then join in the fighting—special parties under brigade command would bring forward supplies from the brigades' dumps at the railway embankment. In the 6th Brigade 120 men were detailed from the 22nd and 24th Battalions to perform this work, under Captain G. Harriott (of Wickliffe, Vic.; killed in action on 4 Oct. 1917), 24th Battalion. In the Lewis gun crews of some battalions, numbers one and two would be armed with revolvers, the rest of the crew carrying rifles and panniers of ammunition.

The jumping-off lines would be pegged and taped by engineers during the hours before the assembly, parties of scouts lying out in front to keep away enemy patrols—these scouts would eventually join the first wave when it caught up with them. Each brigade would be guided by officers with compasses, four of whom would be specially posted on each flank of the advance. White and red flares in different sequences would be fired from each objective as signals of success. To prevent unauthorised orders to "retire," that word would not be used—if withdrawal was found necessary, the command would be given in some other words, such as "get" or "pull out." For communication, besides telephones, each brigade would take forward eight pigeons. As soon as the Hindenburg Line was taken, two "power buzzers" also would be sent forward, but their messages, being easily intercepted by enemy apparatus, must always be coded except in urgent emergency.

positions of German trenches, roads, wire-entanglements, and villages were marked on it with wire and tape. On this battalions and brigades first separately practised by day, the barrage which the troops were to follow being represented by a line of mounted men or of infantry with flags. At intervals during these practices the officers discussed the plans and explained them to the men, and, in some battalions, showed them air-photographs of the German position. The two brigades next carried out a combined rehearsal at 3.30 a.m. on April 27th. This showed that the troops needed practice, especially in assembling and in keeping direction.<sup>50</sup> A second rehearsal was therefore carried out at dawn on April 30th, Generals Gough and Birdwood being present. The performance was much improved, but Brigadier-General Gellibrand noted that the flapping of bayonet scabbards and entrenching tools on the thighs of the assembling men was dangerously loud, and it was consequently arranged that these should be tied down.

It was while the 2nd Division was thus waiting to deliver its attack that the cold April weather, with its bitter winds, fitful snow showers, and intervals of glistening sunshine, suddenly gave way to glorious bright days of gradually increasing warmth.<sup>51</sup> The whole countryside immediately stirred with life.

A beautiful day (notes an Australian diary of April 28). Spring is at last coming fast. The trees during the last two days have been shooting.

(On May 1.) The last four days have been glorious. It is fine, though cool, to-day. Grass is coming out in patches on the Somme battlefield, but I think many of the trees are dead.

The first military consequence was intense fighting in the air; and in this the British pilots, who previously, despite their inferior machines, had never ceased to attack, began at last to turn the scale. The brave policy forced upon them during the last month had been wretchedly expensive; it was in April that the great German ace, Manfred von Richthofen, mainly operating in the Arras-Bullecourt area, scored his most

<sup>50</sup> In this practice a trial was made of starting the attack 400 yards—instead of 500—from the line of the barrage. One of the brigadiers (Gellibrand), however, noted that the assembling troops were dangerously visible at 400 yards, and the jumping-off line accordingly remained fixed at 500 yards short of the barrage.

<sup>51</sup> Voting by the troops in the field for the general elections in Australia also took place at this time, the taking of the poll being organised by Administrative Headquarters, A.I.F., London. The Hughes Government was returned to power.

numerous successes, killing, wounding, or capturing a man every day, and passing Boelcke's record.<sup>52</sup> It was then that Australians first saw, among the fighting squadrons protecting the German reconnaissance aeroplanes, his famous red-nosed machines; some of them flew very low over the Australian batteries in Noreuil valley during the 4th Division's attack on April 11th. But by April 23rd more new British aeroplanes had arrived and the pilots of those already at the front were learning to use them with greater skill. Complete ascendancy such as British and French had established in 1916 on the Somme was, however, not regained in 1917. At almost any desired moment the British air force could establish such superiority that its pilots working with the infantry would be almost unhindered and the infantry and artillery might even be temporarily freed from danger of detection by German airmen. But during April this superiority was only achieved at the cost of heavy loss in the air, and it was never again continuous; German air reconnaissance was seldom effectively prevented for more than part of any day, and was conducted with much more boldness than in 1916.

General Gough had enjoined that in the interval before the coming Bullecourt attack the enemy must be harassed by projecting gas into Bullecourt, Quéant, and near Graincourt-les-Havrincourt, and, between April 27th and 29th, the wind being favourable, this was carried out by a special company of Royal Engineers.<sup>53</sup> Gough had further directed that an effort must be made to deceive the enemy as to the point of attack. To this end General Birdwood, impressed by the reported success of the Bangalore torpedoes on the front of attack, suggested that part of the wire in the Quéant sector also should be ripped up by them, and on the night of April 30th this was attempted by the 7th Field Company with the assistance of two parties of the 2nd Brigade. One party, from the 6th

<sup>52</sup> He operated mainly behind the German lines, the daring of British airmen giving him daily opportunities. On May 1, having two days previously crashed his fifty-second victim, he was sent on leave, his squadron, the 11th Jagdstaffel, being temporarily taken over by his younger brother, Lothar.

<sup>53</sup> On the evening of April 28 the artillery also fired 750 gas-shells into Riencourt. On April 29, when gas was fired into Bullecourt, it was remarked that the German flares went up from beyond Bullecourt, and German shells fell in that village. Lieut.-Colonel Travers of the 26th Battalion, A.I.F., holding the railway, informed Brigadier-General Wisdom that he believed the Germans had withdrawn from the village, as they were constantly expected to do. He accordingly sent a platoon under Lieutenant F. W. Perrett (Ipswich, Q'land) along the road leading into Bullecourt from the east. At the wire the Australians ran into a German post. A bomb-fight followed, and the platoon withdrew.

Battalion and engineers, succeeded in firing most of its tubes, blowing four gaps. The other, from the 5th Battalion and engineers, was detected by the enemy, and failed.<sup>54</sup>

On April 30th, the final order for the attack having been received from army headquarters, the 5th and 6th Brigades returned to the front. The Headquarters of the 5th (Brigadier-General Smith) were in the much-shelled village of Noreuil, but for Brigadier-General Gellibrand (6th Brigade) a special headquarters had been prepared behind the still more shelled railway embankment, practically in the front line. A telephone cable had been buried to this point, and another to an observation post on the spur half-a-mile beyond Noreuil, from which a staff officer, Captain Osborne,<sup>55</sup> would be able to telephone direct to General White at corps headquarters his personal observation of the fight.<sup>56</sup> The full bombardment was resumed, "crashes," in which shells from all guns were timed to fall simultaneously, being fired by the V Corps at Bullecourt on May 2nd, while the heavy artillery attached to I Anzac bombarded that village, Riencourt, Hendecourt, and the German trenches.<sup>57</sup> To destroy a patch of half-cut wire in front of the 6th Brigade just west of the Central Road, a special company of the Royal Engineers fired into it on the night of May 1st a salvo of 144 drums filled with ammonal, a new method, by which it was completely shattered. The brigade dumps—of which four were established on the railway, drawing from two larger ones at "Igri Corner"<sup>58</sup>—were filled to overflowing with small-arms ammunition, bombs, rifle-grenades, Stokes mortar shells, rockets, flares, shovels, picks, barbed-wire, and sandbags. Both

<sup>54</sup> With a view to maintaining activity opposite Quéant, a party of 4 officers and 70 men of the 8th Battalion (2nd Brigade) at 3.45 a.m. on April 22 raided a strong-post in part of the advanced wire-belt south of that village. The post was attacked in front while another party crept to its rear, but the Germans fought both parties and managed to retire, taking with them their machine-gun, but not its tripod. A number were killed and wounded, and three prisoners taken. The 8th Battalion lost 1 killed and 14 wounded.

<sup>55</sup> Colonel R. H. Osborne, D.S.O., M.C., p.s.c. G.S.O. 1, Aust. Mtd. Div., 1917/19. Officer of British Regular Army; of Bangaroo, Canowindra, N.S.W.; b. Sydney, 30 June, 1883.

<sup>56</sup> This provision was possibly made in view of the fact that on April 11 artillery action had been so seriously delayed by mistaken reports from artillery observers.

<sup>57</sup> The wire in front of the second German system (known by the Germans as the "artillery protection line") was, however, reported to be still uncut.

<sup>58</sup> Sometimes spelt "Igarce." A deeply sunken fork in the roads just north of Noreuil. This, like the other sunken roads in the neighbourhood, was much shelled. The Arabic word "Igri" was still generally used in the A.I.F. for "hurry up."

railway and roads were constantly shelled, but the main Australian dumps escaped destruction.<sup>59</sup> The artillery was not so fortunate, and the destruction of ammunition was at one time so great that General Rosenthal had to order that it should no longer be stored in large quantities near the battery positions. It was remarked that just before dawn on April 27th, and almost daily thereafter at the same hour, the enemy laid down a barrage on the area in which the British and Australian troops might be expected to be assembling for attack—a fairly sure sign that he expected the operation. Moreover, on April 29th and 30th searchlights from behind Bullecourt and Riencourt swept the 2nd Division's front.<sup>60</sup> On May 2nd a German aeroplane was hit by fire from the ground and landed in the forward area. A number of Australians running from all directions crowded round the 'plane, to find both German airmen alive, though one was seriously wounded. The other asked at once—"What time is zero?" Captain McDonald of the 20th Battalion answered him—"There's no zero! We're not thinking of attacking." "Oh, we know you are," was the retort. "What time do you start?"

That evening an Australian noted in his diary:

A glorious fine day. Our men thoroughly enjoying it everywhere. The 2nd Division's attack is to come off to-morrow—at last. The two brigades, 5th and 6th, have been out for it, feeding up and resting for weeks and practising as no attack by this corps has ever before been practised. This evening as we came back we met the units of them going up to it, platoon by platoon—one bunch of engineers with a white tape for digging some trench up there.

That night the British artillery maintained only the slow steady bombardment that had become normal of late, but the Germans showed signs of apprehension, systematically shelling, as they had done during the day, the Australian battery positions, and employing at night a large proportion of gas-shells.<sup>61</sup> All night the units of the 2nd Division were moving

<sup>59</sup> The officer responsible for the dump of the 6th Brigade, Lieutenant W. C. Greig (Kensington, Vic.), was, however, mortally wounded by shell-fire at the railway on April 23.

<sup>60</sup> Searchlights were much more dangerous to assembling troops than flares, since their beam could be kept stationary, and detection could not be avoided, as with flares, by simply standing still until their light faded. Accordingly, it was arranged that special machine-guns should fire on these lights if they opened during the assembly or advance.

<sup>61</sup> At noon on May 2 the guns of the 2nd Battery in the Lagnicourt Valley had to be temporarily abandoned, two pits being hit. In Noreuil Valley Captain F. S. Carse (South Yarra, Vic.) was mortally wounded.

up. Behind the two attacking brigades lay, as first reserve, part of the 7th Brigade, mainly in sunken roads behind the railway. Farther in rear, in the Beugny-Ytres line and about Bapaume, the 1st Brigade of the 1st Division, then due for rest, had been placed under the 2nd Division's orders, to come up and release the forward reserves or even itself to furnish support if required. A very large working party from two of its battalions (1st and 2nd), carrying up their own picks and shovels, dug during the night a communication trench 1,200 yards long, from one of the sunken roads north of Noreuil to the railway embankment—the only communication trench in the whole front of the corps or, probably, of the Fifth Army. The 7th Brigade dug several posts in No-Man's Land to guard the right flank.<sup>62</sup> To deceive the Germans into the belief that some action was threatening near Lagnicourt, the 2nd Brigade dug a system of dummy trenches near its support lines—a wise precaution which during the next two days caused the enemy to waste upon these empty excavations a number of shells which might otherwise have gone to increase his barrages in the area of the attack.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Some weeks later these became part of a second communication trench.

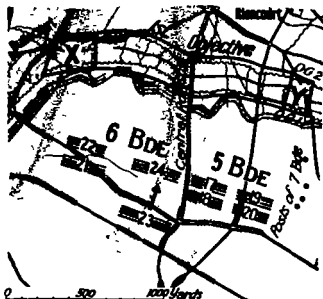
<sup>63</sup> Probably through lack of time, little use was made of this form of "active" camouflage (see *Vol. III, note 61 on p. 887*), which, if scientifically and systematically exploited, would have resulted in great economy of life and many other advantages.



## CHAPTER XII

### THE SECOND BATTLE OF BULLECOURT

At 3.45<sup>1</sup> on May 3rd, beginning a few seconds earlier with a drumming of guns somewhere away on the Fifth Army's left, the British barrage, from Lagnicourt to Vimy, fell. On the right of this huge front, in the re-entrant between Bullecourt and Quéant, the Australian patrols had been out since 10 p.m. protecting the engineers who were laying the tapes. When the moon was sinking, about 2.15, the markers<sup>2</sup> had gone out to their positions, and about fifteen minutes later the leading battalions had begun to file out to them from the railway. In the 5th Brigade, which since midnight had been on the move from Noreuil, there was at 2.45 a check in the progress of the two left battalions, and an officer of the 18th Battalion,<sup>3</sup> going to the head of the column, found that Captain Ronald of the 17th had temporarily stopped the advance at the front line along the sunken road, the moonlight being dangerously bright, and a dozen men having been hit. The Germans were then barraging the jumping-off position opposite that point with trench-mortars, and their searchlight near Hendecourt was at times sweeping the front, increasing the difficulties for both brigades. But at 3 o'clock, it being darker, the movement continued and every wave was in position, though some only just so,<sup>4</sup> at zero hour. In the 6th Brigade also, of the two rear battalions, which were to form their waves at the railway line and advance to the tapes in that formation.



The flanks of the objective (X and Y) were to be gained by bombing after the central position had been taken.

<sup>1</sup> "Summer" time. The true time was 2.45.

<sup>2</sup> In the 6th Brigade—two each for the first and fourth waves, and one for each platoon in the 5th Brigade—one for every fifty yards of the taped lines.

<sup>3</sup> Lieutenant A. W. Irvine

<sup>4</sup> This has been doubted, but the reports are definite.

the inner battalion (23rd) only just reached its position behind the 24th as the British barrage fell, and the battalion went straight on with the attack.

While part of the last waves were still moving into position, and the battalion commanders were inspecting them, at 3.32, a German barrage fell on the railway line and the area immediately in front of it. This was evidently the same precautionary fire that had occurred on previous days at about 4 o'clock.<sup>5</sup> It lasted for ten minutes, but the front waves were ahead of it,<sup>6</sup> and the leading battalions were thus only slightly touched.<sup>7</sup> In the left brigade (6th) part of the fourth wave moved for security into the 4th Division's old jumping-off trench, which was near by. But the left rear battalion, the 21st, lay fairly beneath the barrage; a number of men were hit, and officers and N.C.O.'s found it difficult to arrange the lines with precision.

This fire ceased at 3.42, and for three minutes the front again became quiet. In spite of difficulties, the assembly had been almost perfectly carried out, and it was evident that it had not been detected. On the British barrage opening, the troops fixed bayonets, which till then had been sheathed to avoid their flashing in the moonlight, and advanced. Seven minutes later the German barrage again descended, but the waves were by then almost entirely clear of it.

Between the values of these two Australian brigades, whose men could now be seen against the flashes of the shell-bursts, advancing at quick step towards the Hindenburg Line, there was as little difference as usual with Australian troops. But it is probable that well-informed observers would have pinned their faith a shade more confidently to the 5th (New South Wales). Not only would this probably contain a slightly higher percentage of country-bred men than the 6th (Victoria), but there still remained with it, as backbone, the fine contingent—officers and men—that had rushed to serve with General Holmes in New Guinea in the first days of the war. The

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<sup>5</sup> For example, on April 29 at 4.15; on May 1, from 4 to 4.10.

<sup>6</sup> The area covered by the previous barrages had been observed and, by order from 2nd Divisional Headquarters, it had been planned to keep the jumping-off position in advance of it.

<sup>7</sup> The fire was nevertheless severe enough to make some of their officers on the left anxious lest the waves might be found confused and disordered when the time came to advance. This did not happen.

place of Holmes, its original brigadier, had been taken, since the beginning of the year, by Brigadier-General Smith, a tall, bluff, rubicund Victorian, formerly one of Gellibrand's battalion commanders. Brave, stubborn to a degree that seemingly approached hardness, level-headed, with the slow, somewhat cynical speech and assurance of many Australian business men, abhorring any show of sentiment, idealism, or of such enthusiasms as glowed in his genial predecessor, he had won great credit by his cool judgment during the recent German counter-stroke against Lagnicourt. The brigade's plans had been well laid and thoroughly practised. The German barrage fell mainly on the 6th Brigade's front; and at 3.49 Smith received word that there had been "a good start."

But precisely what happened in his brigade will perhaps never be known. At 4.1, the exact moment for the rushing of O.G.1, observers—watching anxiously from battalion headquarters in the sunken road, from the railway behind it, and from the spur in front of Noreuil—saw its success signal<sup>8</sup> go up from the left part of its front, near the Central Road; at 4.5 the signal was apparently seen again. That of the 6th Brigade farther left went up at 4.10.<sup>9</sup> At 4.16 came the moment of attack on O.G.2, and at 4.26 observers thought they could distinguish the red flares of both brigades<sup>10</sup> indicating its capture. But as German flares, red, white, and green, had streamed into the air after the commencement of the attack, and (though markedly fewer since 4.5) could still be seen through the dust, no certain inference could be drawn. At 3.53 a wounded man had come back to some of the battalion staffs of the 5th Brigade waiting in the sunken road, and reported that all the waves were advancing well. At 4.17 another hobbling in said that he had been hit at the German wire, and that German machine-guns were firing on the advance, one on the right being especially troublesome. Three minutes later, the light then quickly paling towards dawn, there had returned an officer and a number of men bringing news that some other officer had given the order to retire and the troops were coming back. The one who returned

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<sup>8</sup> Two red flares fired simultaneously.

<sup>9</sup> A white flare every ten seconds.

<sup>10</sup> Single red flares for the 6th Brigade, groups of three red flares for the 5th

was ordered to go forward again at once, and Smith, though informed by telephone, did not report the incident to divisional headquarters. But within a few minutes 400 unwounded men, mainly of the rear battalions, without officers, had streamed back into the sunken road. They did not appear in any way panic stricken but were obviously depressed and disappointed. When asked what had happened, the reply of most of them was, "I don't know—it was all a bloody mix-up."<sup>11</sup> Gellibrand, whose own brigade, left of the Central Road, had vanished into the shades ahead, was on the railway within a few hundred yards of the sunken road, and saw this retirement. He telephoned to divisional headquarters, which then inquired of Smith, who replied that some of his brigade had come back but had been ordered forward again.



Arrows show retirement of part of 5th Brigade.

The truth, so far as is known, is that in the first part of their advance along the open spur the waves of the 5th Brigade had fairly well maintained their order and direction, although the right flank tended to extend too far eastwards, and parts of the rear waves, moving up too quickly, actually passed through some of those ahead. On nearing the wire, however, they—as previously the 4th Brigade, numbers of whose dead were still hanging in the entanglement—came under strong machine-gun fire, from the right front near Sans Souci mill, from the German line ahead, and from a machine-gun on the next spur to the left. At this stage, as the barrage would still fall for two minutes on the front German trench, the New South Welshmen had to wait in shell-holes for the moment of attacking it, and this



<sup>11</sup> This was practically all the information the fine young commander of the 19th, Lieut.-Colonel Pye, could obtain from the time when he saw his battalion lying on the tapes until after dusk that night. On May 28 he told a friend that he did not even then know what had really happened.

halt was fatal. The Germans, having seen the advance, were lining their parapet in spite of the barrage, firing. The feeling afterwards among those who took part was that, notwithstanding the increasing machine-gun fire, the trench could have been captured at that moment if they had unitedly rushed it. Here, as everywhere else on the front of attack, the wire had been sufficiently cut;<sup>12</sup> but the troops were scattered in twos and threes in shell-holes, their waves by now completely mixed, and, when the officers under these circumstances attempted to give the lead, only a fraction of the force followed. As the barrage had lifted, the German fire became torrential. Close ahead the Germans were now crowding their parapet, endeavouring to shoot down every leader. Only a bare sufficiency of officers had been allowed to go into the fight, and many of the best of these and of the N.C.O.'s were at once hit, trying to move the troops forward.

Somewhere near the centre some officer lost his head—many men reported that they had been met by him with the order "Pull out—retire—get back for your lives." One man questioned this officer's authority, but he answered: "Never mind, but get back. I'm an officer of the —th Battalion." The word to "pull out" ran along the front. The rear waves had no notion of what had happened ahead of them, but, seeing the front running back on them and hearing that it had been ordered to do so, they too ran back. A great part stopped in shell-holes at the wire. A certain number passed through it. A small party of the 19th with Captain Taylor and Lieutenants Hinds<sup>13</sup> and Cant<sup>14</sup> reached one of the German saps that ran forward through the wire, and occupied it to within bombing distance of the German parapet.<sup>15</sup> Captain Goff,<sup>16</sup> taking the four Stokes mortars to the right flank, passed through the wire on the extreme right and, Lieutenant

<sup>12</sup> In a few places it was still enough of an obstacle to break up the formation of troops crossing it, but not to prevent their passage.

<sup>13</sup> Capt F. G. Hinds, M.C.; 19th Bn. Business manager; of Kirribilli, N.S.W.; b. Williamstown, Vic., 27 March, 1878.

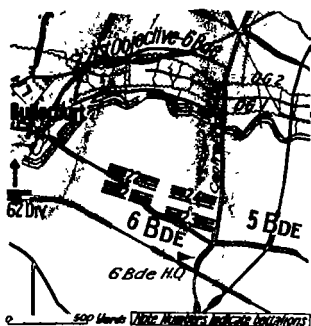
<sup>14</sup> Lieut. J. Cant, 19th Bn. Mining surveyor, of Newcastle, N.S.W.; b. Workington, Cumberland, Eng., 28 Dec., 1882. Killed in action 3 May, 1917.

<sup>15</sup> Lieut. C. W. Davies (Killara, N.S.W.) reached the same position. A few men reached a similar sap just outside the right of the objective, but were caught by the flank barrage of their own artillery.

<sup>16</sup> Capt. G. Goff, M.C.; 8th L.T.M. Bty. Member of Aust. Permanent Forces; of Perth, W. Aust.; b. Coburg, Vic., 25 May, 1888.

Kirkwood<sup>17</sup> of the 19th being killed here and Lieutenant McMeekin<sup>18</sup> wounded, tried to reorganise the infantry and capture O.G.I. But the troops would not now leave cover.<sup>19</sup> On the extreme left Lieutenant Flockart<sup>20</sup> (18th) with Sergeant Temple<sup>21</sup> and a few men entered O.G.I from the Central Road, and, using the bombs from their pockets, fought a short way up the trench. Elsewhere the 5th Brigade's first attack completely failed, and this party also was quickly bombed back to the road. Such was the position on the right at 4.45, an hour after the start.

The advance of the left brigade—the 6th (Victoria)—took place on slightly lower ground, in the dip between the gentle spurs on which the 5th Brigade and the centre of the 62nd Division were operating. Down this depression ran a lower gently-falling tongue along which swept the left of the Victorians. Their right brushed the Central Road running along the bottom of the dip. It will be remembered that this road was half-“sunken,” having along its eastern side a bank everywhere high enough to shelter standing men—a most fortunate circumstance, since troops advancing along it were completely protected from fire from their right. The 24th Battalion which, with the 23rd behind it, advanced along the depression, next to the road, reached the wire with little loss. A German machine-gun which fired at them through the barrage was silenced by Lewis gunners shooting from the hip as they advanced. At the wire the rear waves came up too close, and in the crater-field there the order of the battalion was much broken, and



Position of 6 Bde. at the start  
(Bns. of 5 Bde. not shown).

<sup>17</sup> Lieut. W. R. B. Kirkwood, 19th Bn. Accountant, of Gladesville, N.S.W.; b. Concord, N.S.W., 31 Aug., 1892. Killed in action, 3 May, 1917.

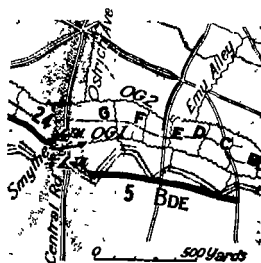
<sup>18</sup> Capt. H. P. McMeekin, M.C., 19th Bn. Accountant, of Melbourne, b. Edenhope, Vic., 3 March, 1886.

<sup>19</sup> Opposite Capt. Goff on the edge of O.G.I. was the old tank (referred to on p. 314 as No. 4) destroyed near cross-trench "D" on April 11. The Germans seemed to use it during the day as an observation post.

<sup>20</sup> Lieut. H. J. Flockart, 18th Bn. Commercial traveller; of Burwood, N.S.W.; b. Waverley, N.S.W., 17 Aug., 1889.

<sup>21</sup> Lieut. W. A. Temple, 18th Bn. Clerk; of Emu Plains, N.S.W.; b. Bungendore, N.S.W., 8 Feb., 1894.

the troops pressed forward dangerously close to the barrage; but when it lifted they were in the German trench with the last shell, and the enemy garrison, not having had time to leave its dugouts, was easily suppressed. Looking over their shoulders as they entered the trench, the Victorians on the right saw the failure of the 5th Brigade.<sup>22</sup> Everyone knew the plans and objectives, and so, as a matter of course, Lieutenant Smythe of the leading company of the 24th, after capturing O.G.1 in his own sector, led a party into that trench on the 5th Brigade's side of the road, bombing the dugouts as he went. He met no opposition until, when 200 yards along the trench, he came close upon some German machine-gunners who were busily firing towards the Australian lines. As Smythe had insufficient force for attacking them, he had to be content with exchanging a few bombs and revolver shots, and then stationed a post two bays farther back to block the trench and safeguard the flank. Two trench-mortars of the 5th Brigade which had come up under cover of the Central Road bank gave protection by firing along O.G.1 over the head of the guard.



The three following waves of the 24th and those of the 23rd had meanwhile passed over O.G.1 to the left of the road, and had then lain close to the barrage as it fell upon O.G.2. At 4.16, the moment it lifted, these troops too were into the trench before the Germans were ready to meet them. Here the 24th captured a machine-gun, two light trench-mortars, an automatic rifle, and a Lewis gun.<sup>23</sup> Here again O.G.2, on the right of the road where it should have been captured by the 5th Brigade, had not been attacked—a few of that brigade who had reached it along the Central Road were found to be merely a party detached from their battalion. Accordingly Lieutenant Pickett<sup>24</sup> (24th) on his own initiative

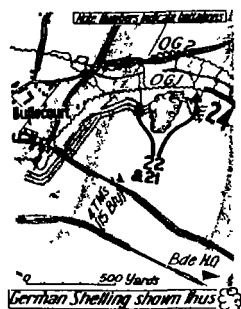
<sup>22</sup> The men of the 5th were "apparently not badly rattled," according to an officer of the 24th Battalion. He likened their retirement to a "crowd rushing across a football ground to cheer the players, and you could see them being cut up by a German machine-gun which was playing on their backs, and by the barrage." The confusion seemed to him largely due to the absence of officers, most of whom had been shot.

<sup>23</sup> Probably one of those lost on April 11 by the 4th Division.

<sup>24</sup> Lieut. R. J. Pickett, M.C.; 24th Bn. Bricklayer; of Dandenong, Vic.; b. Dandenong, 6 March, 1893. Killed in action, 9 Oct., 1917.

entered it with a small party. He blocked and held the mouth of the communication trench ("Cannstatter Graben," "Ostrich Avenue") leading to Riencourt, and pushed further along O.G.2. Here, after killing a few Germans met near cross-trench "G," he blocked and held the main trench, temporarily securing the right flank.

The brigade's left flank in both trenches was much less easily secured. The two battalions which attacked on that flank, the 22nd followed by the 21st, had to advance within point-blank range of the Germans garrisoning the eastern side of Bullecourt, and, like the 46th and 48th in the previous battle, they received, mainly from their left front, heavy fire which neither the gradually lifting barrage nor the fire of the specially placed trench-mortars and machine-guns<sup>25</sup> succeeded in suppressing. In addition, one of the batteries furnishing the German artillery barrage happened, probably by accident, to be throwing its shells very short in front of the German line opposite the centre of the 22nd Battalion's front. Its fire split the advance, the left of the two battalions veering to the left, and their right to the right. The right entered both trenches with the 24th, many officers and men taking advantage of a sap which ran out through the wire<sup>26</sup> and sheltered them from the machine-gun bullets which were sweeping the open. On the extreme left a few men, accompanying Lieutenant Garton,<sup>27</sup> one of the officers whose duty was to set the direction, moved straight ahead, entered O.G.1 at precisely the intended point, and pushed on to O.G.2. But the greater part had fallen too far in rear of the barrage, and found groups of Germans manning their parapet, firing rapidly and showering stick-bombs. Although a fair number of the advancing men held on to within twenty yards of O.G.1, they were then driven to shelter in craters and, after a short



<sup>25</sup> See p. 424.

<sup>26</sup> This was the sap that lay just beyond the right of the 46th Battalion's position in O.G.1 on April 11.

<sup>27</sup> Lieut. H. N. Garton, M.C.; 21st Bn. Apiarist and farmer; of Mooralla, Vic., b. Mooralla, 22 Feb., 1892.

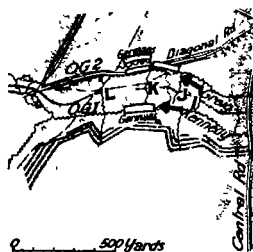


exchange of bombs in which the Germans had the advantage, fell back to the wire. Here, with the greater part of the troops on this flank, together with the two machine-guns and three Stokes mortars intended for flank protection, they were pinned down by fierce rifle and machine-gun fire.

The 6th Brigade had thus seized about half of its objective in the Hindenburg Line. A certain time was allowed for securing its foothold and forming up for the next advance: for seventeen minutes the barrage lay close beyond O.G.1<sup>28</sup> and for thirty-nine minutes beyond O.G.2. During this time in O.G.1 Captain Kennedy<sup>29</sup> (22nd), with the fraction of the first wave of his battalion which had reached that trench and had turned to the left to make good the first wave's objective, was met with German bombs. A bomb-fight followed in which the Victorians won 200 yards of trench. Kennedy held on there, making use of a lull, which followed, to gather bombs from any stray men.

Meanwhile remnants of the later waves of the left battalions had passed on to O.G.2. Those who moved over the open were fired on by German machine-gunners at Riencourt shooting at 700 or 800 yards' range. Many consequently followed the nearest cross-trench, "I." Lieutenant Greig<sup>30</sup> (22nd) with one companion, reaching O.G.2 by this trench, turned to the left and after passing through two empty bays came on a German who threw a bomb. As German stick-bombs often did, it exploded without doing harm.

Two Mills bombs thrown in reply killed the German, but brought down a shower of grenades from some German post immediately beyond. Greig therefore sent his companion back for men and bombs, and, when they arrived, there began a violent, long-drawn-out bomb-fight. Being the senior in that sector, Greig had also to turn his



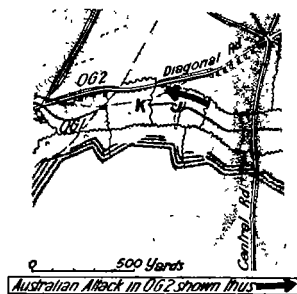
<sup>28</sup> That is, it took six minutes in advancing from O.G.1 to O.G.2 and lay for eleven minutes on O.G.2.

<sup>29</sup> Capt. L. A. Kennedy, 22nd Bn. Clerk, of Melbourne, b. Melbourne, 4 Nov., 1888.

<sup>30</sup> Lieut. G. O. Greig, 22nd Bn. Law clerk; of Albert Park, Vic.; b. Warragul, Vic., 9 Sept., 1889. Killed in action, 17 Sept., 1917.

attention to its consolidation, setting men to dig fire-steps.<sup>31</sup> But Lieutenants Thwaites<sup>32</sup> and Braithwaite<sup>33</sup> (22nd), and Jennings<sup>34</sup> (21st), with other arriving men, carried on the bombing. The opposition came from Germans who had been sheltering in a dugout just beyond the next cross-trench, "J," and who had now set up their machine-gun. Close behind them ran the sunken Diagonal Road,<sup>35</sup> which here passed through O.G.2.

At this crossing—the obstacle which had barred the left flank of the 48th Battalion on April 11th—the Germans had stored in the road an ample dump of bombs, and here a number of their troops had also gathered on being driven out of O.G.1. These, or others, fed the bombs continuously from the dump to the bombers. On the Australian side the carrying parties of the 24th Battalion had all arrived and the bomb-supply had been quickly organised. The fighting was therefore fierce. Lieutenant Jennings had the fingers of his left hand blown off, and Braithwaite was wounded in both arms, but they continued to fight, using, as ordered, a large proportion of captured German grenades. The Australians were throwing slightly uphill,<sup>36</sup> but they slowly made headway—capturing two bays, losing one, capturing two more, again losing one—until their opponents, approaching the road, made a stubborn stand behind a dugout entrance. At this point a Stokes mortar under Lance-Corporal Mitchell<sup>37</sup> (6th Light Trench Mortar Battery) arrived from the



<sup>31</sup> Without these, owing to the depth of the trench, it was impossible to look over the parapots and command the ground in front.

<sup>32</sup> Lieut. J. A. Thwaites, 22nd Bn. Dental surgeon; of Armadale, Vic.; b. Tallangatta, Vic., 15 Sept., 1890.

<sup>33</sup> Capt. W. McC. Braithwaite, M.C.; 22nd Bn. Tanner; of Preston, Vic.; b. Preston, 8 Nov., 1892. Killed in action, 3 Oct., 1918.

<sup>34</sup> Lieut. J. E. Jennings, 21st Bn. Commercial traveller; of Moonee Ponds, Vic.; b. Moonee Ponds, 14 Aug., 1885. Killed in action, 3 May, 1917.

<sup>35</sup> See p. 309.

<sup>36</sup> The trench here climbed the lower undulation that ran like a tongue down the main depression.

<sup>37</sup> Cpl. J. Mitchell, M.M. (No. 1068; 6th L.T.M. Bty.). Hotel employee; of Korumburra, Vic.; b. Toora, Vic., 1893.

right.<sup>38</sup> Rifle-grenades could not be used, as the necessary adapters had not come to hand; but, with the bombers throwing in front, the Lewis gunners twenty yards behind firing from a corner of a bay or from shell-holes, and the Stokes mortar, further behind still, shooting over them, it was found that the rain of German grenades withered. The hostile bombers were driven back, but only to a second dugout, beyond whose entrance they again stood and bombed, others lining the bank of the road now immediately in rear.

The attack was reorganised and this strong-point was rushed by a party under Sergeant Arblaster<sup>39</sup> (21st) and Corporal O'Neill<sup>40</sup> (22nd). The Germans were fighting most stubbornly; none but wounded men were found in their dugouts—those who could fight retreated to the continuation of the trench beyond the road, and from there bombarded the captured post with stick-grenades and with “pineapple” bombs thrown by a *granatenwerfer*,<sup>41</sup> driving the Victorians back and recapturing the post. The Stokes mortar now turned upon the *granatenwerfer* and silenced it with the second shot. At this stage the missing adapters arrived, and under a barrage of rifle-grenades twenty Victorians of all battalions again rushed the post. But bombs now ran short, and at about 4.50 a.m. they were again driven out.

It was while this fierce struggle was proceeding close on their flank that the waves for the later objectives must, in accordance with the plan, pass over O.G.2 and assemble behind the barrage, so as to begin soon after 5 o'clock their advance to the second objective, 400-600 yards across the

<sup>38</sup> Of the six Stokes mortars of the 6th Company which went forward with the attack, three under Lieutenant J. A. Gray (Upper Hawthorn, Vic.), intended for the left flank, were caught in the repulse of that wing of the attack. Gray and the crews became involved in the bomb-fighting there, but could not get into the German trench; the survivors returned that night with one of their mortars. Of the three guns in the centre, under Sergeant S. E. Roberts (Moonce Ponds, Vic.), all three fired on the German strong-post in O.G.1 slightly east of the Central Road. One mortar was immediately blown out. One, under Corporal T. H. Scholfield (Telangatuk East, Vic.), next supported the left but ran out of ammunition. Roberts then sent a party under Scholfield into the area behind the trenches to gather ammunition which had been left there. This party returned with 120 rounds. Sixty were allotted to each of the remaining guns. Mitchell's gun was then sent to the right flank in O.G.2, but was afterwards relieved by Scholfield's (withdrawn from the left in O.G.1), and sent to the left in O.G.2, the left in O.G.1 being thus deprived of its support.

<sup>39</sup> Sgt. F. Arblaster (No. 4658; 21st Bn.). Clerk; of Footscray, Vic.; b. Williamstown, Vic., 16 Aug., 1890.

<sup>40</sup> Sgt. L. T. O'Neill, M.M. (No. 520; 22nd Bn.). Stock agent, of Casterton, Vic.; b. Dunolly, Vic., 10 July, 1892.

<sup>41</sup> A small apparatus for firing a segmented bomb with cartridge attached (a device somewhat similar to that of a Stokes mortar shell).

open. The third wave was to have prepared the way by throwing forward posts 150 yards into the open ground beyond O.G.2. The fire of several rearward German machine-guns, sweeping this area from front and both flanks, had prevented this from being done, and it was further known that as yet no troops had come up on either right or left. But it was vital to keep faith with other troops by adherence to the time-table. Accordingly, in the sector in which the 6th Brigade had succeeded, the fourth wave of the 24th Battalion, under Captain Maxfield, moved out to lie beneath the barrage. The four following waves, formed by the 23rd Battalion which was charged with the capture of the third objective, also moved out to wait in front of O.G.2, but the difficulty of finding sufficient shelter in the comparatively small space behind the barrage resulted in some parts becoming mixed and caused others to return temporarily to the shelter of O.G.2.

It was always a difficult task to co-ordinate and control the movement of troops pinned down in scattered shell-holes by machine-gun fire—especially in the half-light of dawn or dusk. But when the barrage advanced Maxfield led forward his wave, and with 2 officers and 30 men reached the second objective, 500 yards beyond the Hindenburg Line. This objective on the 24th's front had been slightly advanced to include the line of a field-tramway whose low embankment curved westwards from the six cross-roads south-west of Riencourt. It was to be captured at 5.25, and was not occupied by the enemy except on the extreme left where, in a fork of the tramway and the road, two or three Germans were afterwards observed trying to get away undetected. Maxfield's flare announcing the capture of this objective was sent up, and seen, at 5.34. At the same time he sent by runner a message that both his flanks were in the air, and that no Lewis or Vickers guns had yet come up. "Lobbed here absolutely on my own," he reported some time later.



The waves of the 23rd Battalion, which were to follow Maxfield, were not concerned with the attack on this objective, but were merely to wait there to carry out the next advance at 6 o'clock. Like Maxfield, their leaders were hampered by the difficulty of controlling movement in the crater-field, and long after this advance numerous men of all units were still out in shell-holes beyond the Hindenburg Line waiting for a definite order, or uncertain what was required of them. Part of the leading waves of the 23rd, however, under Captain Pascoe,<sup>42</sup> started about the same time as Maxfield, and, keeping closer to the Central Road, reached the second objective immediately to the left of the Six Cross Roads. It was presently realised that by moving along the Central Road, or creeping behind the broken hedge of the Diagonal Road—the solitary feature in that part of the crater-field—the Six Cross Roads could be reached without annihilating casualties, and chiefly by these approaches men continued to dribble up thither.

Although, in the light of shells and flares, some of the 6th Brigade had noted the confusion of the 5th on their right, the sight of the 5th Brigade's trench-mortars taking position on the Central Road had given currency to reports that part of that brigade was in line on that flank.<sup>43</sup> But when the advance was continued to the second objective it was apparent that the 5th Brigade was not keeping pace. Captain Pascoe (23rd) at the Six Cross Roads could see, 500 yards to the east of him, men standing head and shoulders above the parapet of the "Calwer Graben" ("Emu Alley"), the easternmost of the two long communication trenches from Riencourt to the Hindenburg Line. Beside him Lieutenant Fethers (23rd) peering through field-glasses discovered that these were Germans, busily firing at stray men of his own or other battalions then crossing the Hindenburg lines.<sup>44</sup>

But much nearer, only seventy yards east of the Six Cross Roads, ran the western communication trench (Ostrich

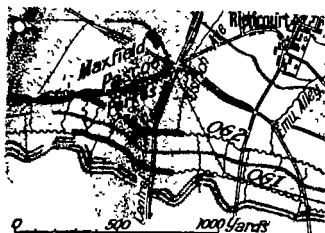
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<sup>42</sup> Commanding the sixth wave. Captain F. H. Dunn (Parkville, Vic.) commanding the seventh wave was killed.

<sup>43</sup> These helped to conceal from Brig.-General Smith the extent of his brigade's failure.

<sup>44</sup> These Germans were obviously unaware of the presence of Australians at the second objective, and, though some of these fired at them, the Germans continued to shoot only at those farther back

Avenue). If this was in German hands, the position of the 6th Brigade on the second objective would be precarious. Seeing that the flank appeared to be entirely open, Captain Parkes,<sup>45</sup> commanding the last wave of the 23rd, ordered his men to line the bank of the Central Road, facing east between the first and second objectives. He then sent Sergeant Dixon<sup>46</sup> with a couple of men eastwards to the nearer communication trench (Ostrich Avenue) to find out who, if any-one, was holding it. Dixon's party approaching the trench caught sight of some steel helmets in it, and was about to fire when they found these to



belong to half-a-dozen of the 18th Battalion (5th Brigade) who had reached their proper position on the flank of the 6th, but, finding no one else there, were retiring down the trench to seek their battalion.<sup>47</sup> About the same time Captain Pascoe and Lieutenant Brewster<sup>48</sup> at the Six Cross Roads had made their way to where this communication trench crossed it, and there chanced upon a similar party of men of the 19th, who were also withdrawing down it.<sup>49</sup> Realising the importance of blocking this trench, Pascoe collected a dozen of his own brigade and, sending along his line a call for sandbags, barricaded it immediately north of the Moulin Sans Souci road and left Brewster in charge of this post. For some reason, although the Victorians held almost continuously its southern end in O.G.2, this trench was never used for communication with the troops at the Six Cross Roads.

<sup>45</sup> Capt. P. G. R. Parkes, M.C.; 23rd Bn. Salesman; of Colac, Vic.; b. Colac, 26 April, 1891.

<sup>46</sup> Lieut. V. Dixon, D.C.M., M.M.; 23rd Bn. Mechanical engineer, of Appin, N.S.W.; b. Tumut, N.S.W., 23 April, 1897.

<sup>47</sup> On receiving this news, Parkes at once sent Dixon back to ascertain whether the 5th Brigade was holding its sector of the Hindenburg Line, east of the Central Road. Dixon was caught in a heavy bomb-fight then being waged in O.G.2 by a mixed party of both brigades; he was there wounded, but duly reported the position to Major W. M. Trew (23rd) at the Central Road, in charge of the whole forward position.

<sup>48</sup> Lieut. A. C. Brewster, M.C.; 23rd Bn. Farmer; of Stawell, Vic.; b. Grafton, N.S.W., 7 June, 1888. Killed in action, 4 Oct., 1917.

<sup>49</sup> It seems possible, and even likely, that the reports err in detail, and that this party was the same as that seen by Dixon.

The right of Maxfield's line on the second objective was thus guarded, but on the left the conditions were different. As has been seen, the left half of the 6th Brigade had been split at the Hindenburg wire. Only a small part of the battalions composing it—21st and 22nd—had reached O.G.1 or 2, and that fraction had immediately plunged into fierce bomb-fighting along both trenches in the struggle to secure the flank there. There was no sign whatever of the British troops coming up on that flank; but it had been made clear that part of the duty of the Victorians was to give the 62nd Division a lead. Accordingly a few of the 22nd had gone on with Maxfield, and several officers of the 21st, after reorganising parts of the later waves in O.G.2, also continued the advance. Of these officers, Lieutenants Hunt<sup>50</sup> and Jennings on the left found the Germans in the Diagonal Road, close in front of O.G.2, in holts with the Victorian bombing parties on that flank. The advancing party immediately rushed this road and cleared it of the enemy, bombing the dugouts and shelters, killing a number of Germans, and enabling the bombers to clear O.G.2 as far as the road, and then to cross the road, and enter the trench beyond. Hunt's party thus became involved in the flank fighting in which the Victorians now had a force superior to the enemy's. Some of his men lined the road and others were placed out in the crater-field beyond, where, lying on the low tongue of rising land, they had a good command of part of the surrounding country. Sergeant Hitchcock<sup>51</sup> of the 6th Machine Gun Company also crossed the road and placed his guns in commanding positions.



A little farther to the right Captain Bland<sup>52</sup> of the 21st. with Lieutenant Duncan<sup>53</sup> and some 50 men, advanced for

<sup>50</sup> Capt. E. M. Hunt, M.C.; 21st Bn. Bank clerk; of Bendigo, Vic.; b. Young, N.S.W., 18 Aug., 1896.

<sup>51</sup> Capt. A. P. Hitchcock, D.C.M.; 6th M.G. Coy. Civil servant; of Moreland, Vic.; b. Hunnominjie, Vic., 18 May, 1890.

<sup>52</sup> Capt. E. M. Bland, M.C.; 21st Bn. Salesman; of Brighton, Vic.; b. Melbourne, 24 April, 1896.

<sup>53</sup> Capt. C. V. Duncan, 21st Bn. Commercial traveller; of Armadale, Vic.; b. Sale, Vic., 4 May, 1884.

about 150 yards along the rise, and then waited for the attack on the second objective. No other troops were anywhere near, but later, having seen the advance of Maxfield to his right front, Bland sent a messenger across to the tramline offering to join him, if required. The messenger succeeded in getting through and returned with a request from Maxfield for assistance; but when Bland's party, then 40 strong, attempted to go forward it was met with such a cross-fire of machine-guns, especially from the far right, that within sixty yards it was driven into shell-holes and stopped. Except for this party, 300 yards to his left rear, Maxfield's left flank was entirely open, and eventually a German machine-gun, established at an enemy battalion headquarters, 500 yards to his left, and firing along that end of the tramway, rendered the left of the second objective untenable.

Thus two hours from the commencement of the attack the centre of the 2nd Australian Division had reached the second objective, but with troops barely sufficient to hold it, much less to push on at 6 o'clock and seize Riencourt; behind them the right and the extreme left of the division had failed, and the centre was fighting vehemently on both flanks in both trenches of the Hindenburg Line to maintain its 400 yards of precarious foothold. The youthful commander and adjutant<sup>54</sup> of the 24th Battalion, both of whom had served on Gellibrand's staff, had gone forward at 5.10 and planted their headquarters in a dugout in O.G.2.

At Gellibrand's headquarters on the railway—which, with the headquarters of the 23rd and 24th as a forward centre, became from this moment the real centre of active direction in the fight—the retirement of the 5th Brigade was seen; and, although its own commander and divisional headquarters were slower in recognising the full extent of the reverse,<sup>55</sup> Gellibrand at once realised that it was such as to jeopardise the success of the whole plan. That the 5th Brigade should keep up with the other troops was vital. As there was no time to spare, he at once took on his shoulders

<sup>54</sup> Capt. J. E. Lloyd and S. G. Savige.

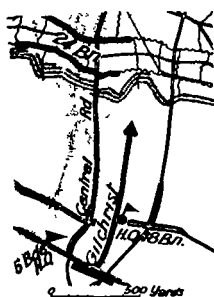
<sup>55</sup> Gellibrand suggested that General Smith should be sent up to see the situation for himself.



the task of reorganising those of its officerless troops who were reaching the railway embankment. With him were two youngsters of his famous staff, Captain Gilchrist of the 6th Field Company, who had just come back after a night in No-Man's Land where he had laid the tapes for his brigade, and Lieutenant Rentoul, signalling officer. These two at once offered to collect the scattered troops and lead them again to the Hindenburg Line, and in this they were joined by Lieutenant Gritten<sup>56</sup> of the 20th Battalion, who had been sent to Gellibrand as *liaison* officer from the 5th Brigade. About 100 stray men were formed up by Gilchrist along the railway to the right of the Central Road, and Gellibrand obtained authority from divisional headquarters to throw in Major Thorn's<sup>57</sup> company of the 26th Battalion (7th Brigade), which was lining the railway.

At about 5.25, led by these boys and the officers of Thorn's company, the advance began. On crossing the sunken road, 300 yards in front of the railway, Gilchrist and his colleagues exhorted the men of the 5th Brigade who were sheltering there to join the advance.

Lieutenant-Colonel Murphy<sup>58</sup> of the 18th Battalion, whose headquarters were in the road, had already ordered one of his subalterns, Lieutenant Davies, to collect what men he could and go forward again; but, until the wave led by Major Thorn and Gellibrand's youngsters appeared at the road-bank, Murphy knew nothing of their intended attempt, and, its leaders being strange to the troops in the road,<sup>59</sup> only a few scrambled out in answer to their call. Colonel Murphy, however, and other officers of the 18th in the road at once decided to follow as a second wave, and on Murphy's word—



<sup>56</sup> Lieut. S. W. Gritten, M.C.: 5th M.G. Coy. Secretary, Sydney University Union; of Newtown, N.S.W.; b. London, 23 Dec., 1892. Killed in action, 9 Oct., 1917.

<sup>57</sup> Major P. J. Thorn, V.D.; 26th Bn. Solicitor; of Brisbane and Sydney; b. Ipswich, Q'land, 28 Nov., 1879.

<sup>58</sup> Lieut.-Col. G. F. Murphy, C.M.G., D.S.O. Commanded 18th Bn., 1916/18. School teacher; Sheriff of New South Wales since 1925; of Sydney and Bathurst, N.S.W.; b. Sydney, 24 Sept., 1883.

<sup>59</sup> Although Rentoul had formerly served in the 20th Battalion

"Come on, men"—more than 200 lined out. No artillery barrage covered them. They advanced at a steady walk, rifles slung or at the trail, through the German artillery barrage and under fire of a few snipers until near the entanglement, when German machine-guns opened. The stream of bullets from two guns could be seen ripping up the ground and raising two small dust-clouds which gradually converged until they met. The troops were now passing shell-holes crowded with their mates, who had been sheltering there since the first attack, and they began to take cover. Of the leaders, who were systematically picked off by German snipers, many of the finest were again hit. Rentoul had been wounded before reaching the wire, and was later killed. Of the 26th, Major Thorn and Lieutenants Major,<sup>60</sup> Homer,<sup>61</sup> and Lanyon<sup>62</sup> were hit—the last two mortally, both splendid officers. The 18th Battalion in its double attempt lost, killed or wounded, 12 of its 22 officers engaged, and 61 of its 84 N.C.O's. Colonel Murphy moved across to steady first the right and then the left,<sup>63</sup> but the advance ended slightly beyond the wire. Only on the left did three men led by Captain Gilchrist—and still further to that flank, under cover of the Central Road, two parties under Lieutenants Davies and Irvine of the 18th Battalion—enter O.G.I.

It was only a few minutes earlier that Lieutenant Smythe of the 24th had placed his flank-guard 200 yards along this trench. He was returning down it to his proper sector when he saw the last stage of Gilchrist's attack, and immediately afterwards came upon that keen officer hurrying eastward, quite alone, along O.G.I. "These men are all right. All they want is a leader!" said Gilchrist. When Smythe began to explain the position to him, "All they need is a leader," Gilchrist repeated, and pushed past him down the trench. Here he took charge of the guard of the 6th Brigade, and

<sup>60</sup> Lieut. F. W. F. Major, 26th Bn. Draughtsman; of Lindisfarne, Tas.; b. Hobart, 8 Feb., 1897.

<sup>61</sup> Lieut. H. W. Homer, M.M.; 26th Bn. Railway clerk; of Indooroopilly, Q'land; b. Kington, Herefordshire, Eng., 1 March, 1894. Died of wounds, 1 June, 1917.

<sup>62</sup> Lieut. R. J. Lanyon, 28th Bn. Bank clerk, of Rockhampton, Q'land; b. Comet, Q'land, 16 May, 1891. Killed in action, 3 May, 1917. (Lanyon was an officer of the 28th temporarily attached to the 26th.)

<sup>63</sup> Each came under enfilade machine-gun fire, the right from near Sans Souci mill, the left from the Bullecourt-Hendecourt road.

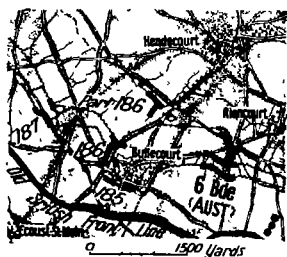
at once used the small bomb-supply from the men's pockets in an attempt to clear the trench eastwards. They were joined by Lieutenant Irvine and a few of the 5th Brigade, but were almost immediately driven back, and about the same time the Germans thrust back the 6th Brigade's post in O.G.2 also. Thus, shortly before 6 o'clock, except for a few yards east of the Central Road, the right half of the Australian objective in the Hindenburg Line was still in the hands of the enemy.

On the left also, where the 62nd British Division was attacking Bullecourt and the Hindenburg Line west of it, no signs of success had yet appeared—at least none visible to the attacking Australians who, constantly turning their eyes in that direction, saw flares still rising from the dust haze over Bullecourt.<sup>64</sup> The 62nd had until late in 1915 been a second-line division, supplying the 49th with drafts, and it was not yet the effective formation that it afterwards became. The Australian staff had noted that its officers did not seem confident beforehand of success; and now Gellibrand's *liaison* officer—a specially trusted assistant<sup>65</sup>—with the British brigade (185th) on his flank could send him no reliable early information, its headquarters being some distance behind Longatte. Headquarters of the 62nd Division reported at 6.13 that it believed Bullecourt had been taken by its right brigade, and at 6.20 that its centre and left brigades had apparently failed and been driven back to their starting point. Later it gradually became known that, though all three brigades had captured at least part of their first objective, it was the centre (186th Brigade) that had penetrated farthest. Actually, after seizing the western defences of Bullecourt and the Hindenburg Line north-west of them, its troops passed on at 7 o'clock in an endeavour to reach the second objective and "join hands with the Australians." A haze of dust and shell-smoke covered the battlefield, but through it one or two observers noted British troops well beyond Bullecourt. Some

<sup>64</sup> At 4.10 Captain Osborne telephoning from his advanced observation post to General White at corps headquarters said that he "didn't like to see so many flares coming up from Bullecourt." An observer further back noted at 4.35 "Germans still on our left front near Bullecourt, to judge by red and white flares." Five minutes later it was reported to I Anzac that flares (German) were still rising from Bullecourt. The parties far out on the second objective were watching them also.

<sup>65</sup> Major A. R. L. Wiltshire of the 22nd Bn.

thought these observers mistaken, but later reports from the north-west of Bullecourt showed that part of the 2/7th Duke of Wellington's West Riding and 2/8th West Yorkshire Regiments had advanced to the second objective 1,000 yards south-west of Hendecourt and a similar distance to the left of Maxfield's position on the tramway. There they appear to have occupied a trench close to the sugar factory. That evening at 7.15 p.m. an air patrol of the 3rd Squadron, R.F.C.,<sup>66</sup> saw them light their flares, and at 6.15 next morning (May 4th), an observer of the 15th Squadron, R.F.C., observed them still in the trench waving to him, and one of their patrols out trying to get touch with their own side. But before noon on the previous day the Hindenburg trenches behind them—which, but for the foolish inflation of the objectives, they might have assisted in holding—had been lost; their position was hopeless, and they were afterwards killed or captured.



The left brigade (187th) had captured part of the front Hindenburg trench, but was repulsed before the second. Lieutenant-Colonel Watson<sup>67</sup> of 5th King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry rallied it, but both he and his adjutant were killed, the second attempt failed, and by an early hour the brigade was driven out of the front line also.

But it was the right brigade (185th) whose progress most affected the Australians. This brigade, when forming up, was somewhat disarranged by the same barrage that fell on the Victorians, and, when it advanced, its right failed through machine-gun fire.<sup>68</sup> The dugouts hidden amid the rubbish heaps and shattered trenches of that "village" provided, as will be explained later,<sup>69</sup> a most difficult problem, even when

<sup>66</sup> The squadron then attached to I Anzac.

<sup>67</sup> Lieut.-Col. W. Watson. Officer of British Regular Army; commanded 2/5th Bn K.O.Y.L.I., 1916/17. Of Hedon, Yorks., Eng.; b. Hedon, 17 June, 1880. Killed in action, 3 May, 1917.

<sup>68</sup> According to some accounts, this came from a German post in the old British tank (No. 11, see pp. 315-6) in the wire south-east of Bullecourt.

<sup>69</sup> P. 490.

not shrouded in the dark and the dust haze of the bombardment. Tank officers afterwards expressed the opinion, which German evidence tends to confirm, that the infantry left too much to the tanks; the British infantry, on the other hand, alleged that some of the tank crews seemed half-hearted. By 6 o'clock nearly all of the brigade had been driven back,<sup>70</sup> though fragments of it held on in part of the trench around the southern face of the village.

The failure of the 5th Brigade on the right and of the British brigade on the left of the 6th Australian Brigade soon gave rise to several important changes in the plan of the attack. First, at 5.20 General Smyth of the 2nd Australian Division, having recognised the 5th Brigade's failure and authorised the renewal of its attack, decided to hold back the barrage for an additional half-hour at the second objective, on which it was then falling. This meant postponing the attack on that objective for half-an-hour and giving the 5th Brigade a chance of catching up and participating in that operation. The order was given without previous reference to Gellibrand,<sup>71</sup> whose troops, if they advanced according to programme, would at that moment be lying out ready to attack in five minutes' time the objective on which the barrage was now to be maintained. At 5.34 their success signal was seen, showing that they had reached it, and it was not until six minutes later that Gellibrand was informed that the artillery had been ordered to continue its fire upon that line. In consequence of his protest, the guns were immediately directed to lift to the "blue" barrage line, protecting the second objective; they were to keep their fire there until 6.30 (instead of 6), and then continue with the barrage programme, but making each lift half-an-hour later than had been arranged in the original time-table. Fortunately the artillery had already lifted from the tramline before the first order reached it. Whether any batteries afterwards shortened, and, if so, to what extent the troops on the tramway suffered

<sup>70</sup> To assist the 62nd Division in Bullecourt, the medium trench-mortars of the 4th Australian Division were to be emplaced in that village after its capture. The crews with their mortars and ammunition were waiting on the railway embankment on that flank, when, at 4.30, a German shell exploded their ammunition, destroying all the mortars and ammunition and placing out of action 31 of the 100 men.

<sup>71</sup> Both infantry brigades were to be informed that the order was being issued, but the message did not reach Gellibrand until 5.40.

through this muddle, is difficult to ascertain.<sup>72</sup> Shortly before 7 o'clock a message was received from Maxfield stating that the artillery was shooting short; but his casualties from this cause were much heavier later, when the barrage was supposed to be lying 200 yards beyond the tramline.

A second important change in the programme was urged by Gellibrand at 6.20. In spite of reports to the contrary sent from the 62nd to the 2nd Australian Division, Gellibrand and his staff, by merely looking out of their headquarters, could see that the brigade on their flank had failed to take Bullecourt.<sup>73</sup> The nearest support for his troops on that flank was thus a mile in rear, and on the other flank the 5th Brigade, even if it took the Hindenburg Line, would still be a quarter of a mile behind. In these circumstances it

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<sup>72</sup> The successive orders by which it was endeavoured to effect this change are worth recording as showing how difficult, not to say dangerous, was any sudden interference with programme. At 5.20 General Smyth (and Division) ordered his artillery commander to prolong the 5.25 barrage for thirty minutes. At the same time he rang up General White (Corps) and asked for a similar extension of the heavy artillery barrage. He also directed that the 5th and 6th Brigades should be informed. At 5.28 his artillery commander informed him that, before the order could get through, the barrage had already moved forward. He asked if he should bring it back, and was told to do so. Between 5.28 and 5.32 this order was being sent to the field artillery brigades. At 5.34 Gellibrand (6th Brigade) sends a message to divisional headquarters that his troops are on the second objective. At 5.40 he first hears of the barrage being continued on that objective. His message reaches the divisional commander about 5.45, and at 5.51 the field artillery brigades, which in any case were due to lift to their next line (the "blue" line) at 5.55, receive an order to lift to it at once and keep their fire there till further notice. Between 5.57 and 6.10 orders were sent to the field artillery brigades to fire on the "blue" line until 6.30 and then proceed with the programme half-an-hour delayed. As for the heavy artillery barrage, General White, finding that there was difficulty in arranging in time the extension of the 5.25 barrage, had arranged for thirty minutes' extension on the 6 o'clock line. Several alterations of orders, apparently based on misunderstandings and quickly corrected, are omitted from this list; and, in considering the effect of the messages here recorded, the reader must remember that many messages concerning the field artillery had to pass between five separate headquarters—those of infantry brigades and division, and artillery groups, brigades, and batteries—and each message would take at least several minutes in getting through.

<sup>73</sup> The arrangements for communication and *liaison* gave rise to an interesting but highly aggravating conflict between the information which reached Gellibrand through his eyes or direct from his *liaison* officer with the 185th Brigade—which he knew to be accurate—and that which, often two hours late, reached him from the same brigade by a circuitous route through the headquarters of both divisions. Probably through inexperience, the staff of the 185th Brigade tended to attach undue credence to each favourable rumour, and its telegraphed reports represented the position more cheerfully than was justified by the facts. The much more accurate reports which were sent to Gellibrand by runner from his *liaison* officer (Major Wiltshire) arrived at least an hour earlier. But even before these came to hand, the actual events had been observed from the railway embankment. Thus, at 5.7 Gellibrand's artillery *liaison* officer had reported that Bullecourt had not yet been taken. At 5.54 Colonel Forbes of the 21st Battalion, whose headquarters were at the railway to the left of Gellibrand's, reported that the British troops could be seen retiring from that village. Consequently, although at 6.13 the 62nd Division informed the 2nd Australian that they thought Bullecourt had been taken, and General Wisdom (7th Brigade) also reported that the Germans were shelling the village—from which it might be inferred that they had lost it—Gellibrand knew that the place was in German hands.

seemed to Gellibrand that the advance of his own troops from the second objective—which, according to the changed plan, should occur at 6.30—would be dangerous in the extreme. He represented this at 6.20 to General Smyth, who at once referred the matter to corps headquarters. The reply was that the programme of the advance must be steadily carried out.

In these circumstances Smyth decided to help forward the two flanks by throwing into the fight two battalions of the 7th Brigade—one to assist the British to capture Bullecourt, and come up on Gellibrand's left,<sup>74</sup> the other to protect Gellibrand's right in the second objective.<sup>75</sup> Before, however, either of these movements were carried out, the suggestion made by Gellibrand at 6.20 had been adopted. News had apparently reached corps headquarters that the 62nd Division, believing its central and left brigades to have failed, had decided to bring back the barrage on their front and organise a new attack.<sup>76</sup> This involved the abandonment of the original time-table, and—presumably as a result of this, and after consultation with the V Corps—Birdwood at 7.3, countermanding his previous order, directed the 2nd Australian Division to stand on the second objective, and brought back the barrage to protect it.<sup>77</sup> When, if at all, the 62nd Division should reach that position and be ready to advance farther, the Australian advance also would be resumed.

The battalion allotted to assist in the capture of Bullecourt had meanwhile reached Gellibrand, but, as to the direction from which it should attack the village, a sharp difference of opinion had arisen between him and the divisional staff. The latter proposed that the troops should advance against it from the south-east. Gellibrand protested that

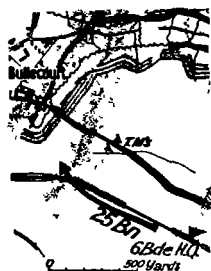
<sup>74</sup> Smyth had already, at 6 a.m., suggested to Birdwood the offer of a battalion to assist the British to capture Bullecourt.

<sup>75</sup> This battalion—the 26th—was to form a flank from the Six Cross Roads to the Hindenburg Line further east, which, it was assumed, the 5th Brigade would have recaptured.

<sup>76</sup> Whether this arrangement was modified in time to prevent fire being turned upon the advanced troops of the centre brigade, who had to some extent succeeded, no available records show.

<sup>77</sup> At 7.30, when this order reached the artillery, its barrage was approaching the final line of its programme. It was brought back at once to the "red" barrage line, beyond Riencourt, and at 7.40, on its being ascertained that there were none of the 6th Brigade beyond the second objective, it dropped to the "blue" line, protecting the second objective.

the bare ground there was swept by machine-guns and that the attempt, if undertaken, should be made from the 62nd Division's front. He was overruled. The 25th (Queensland) Battalion<sup>78</sup> was moved to the left behind the railway bank, with orders, from its own brigade, to attack from there. Upon its commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Norrie,<sup>79</sup> consulting him, Gellibrand stated his opinion and advised Norrie that if the attempt must be made he should first test its practicability by sending forward a single platoon. Accordingly Norrie sent two platoons, the first under Lieutenant Barlow,<sup>80</sup> the second under Lieutenant Healy.<sup>81</sup> These filed along behind the bank of the railway to a point 300 yards from Bullecourt, and then at 7.15 turned across the open towards the town. For 100 yards a slight fold of the ground protected them, but as they emerged from this they were met by withering fire. The four Stokes mortar crews of the 15th Light Trench Mortar Battery stationed east of Bullecourt saw the attempt, and fired forty-five rounds in an endeavour to suppress the machine-guns, but without success. The advancing troops were pinned in shell-holes, from which, at dusk, they returned after the loss of half their number. It was reported to General Smyth that the advance of the 25th had been stopped by machine-gun fire.<sup>82</sup>



The other reinforcing battalion, allotted to form a flank from Gellibrand's right at the Six Cross Roads was eventually not used for that purpose. This change of plan followed the receipt of the news that the 5th Brigade had failed in its second frontal attack, but was now endeavouring to seize its first objective by bombing eastward up the Hindenburg Line

<sup>78</sup> Two companies of the 25th had already reached the railway in replacement of the part of the 26th employed in Gilchrist's attack, and the remaining two had since been ordered up.

<sup>79</sup> Brigadier E. C. Norrie, C.B., D.S.O., V.D. Commanded 25th Bn, 1916/18. Architect; of Sydney; b. Grafton, N.S.W., 28 Sept., 1885.

<sup>80</sup> Lieut. F. H. Barlow, 25th Bn. Draughtsman; of Toowoomba, Q'land; b. "Wulga," near Surat, Q'land., 8 Oct., 1896.

<sup>81</sup> Lieut. M. D. Healy, 25th Bn. Warehouseman; of Wellington, N.Z., and Sydney; b. Wellington, 5 Feb., 1890. Killed in action, 20 Sept., 1917.

<sup>82</sup> The 25th Bn was thereupon ordered to seize any opportunity for further advance and, to assist it, two Stokes mortars of the 7th Brigade were packed on a limber and taken at a gallop to the railway embankment. No opportunity for advance in this direction, however, occurred.



from the Central Road. This half-sheltered road, though subject to fire from the north-west, was proving at nearly all times a possible avenue for the sending of troops and supplies from the railway embankment to the Hindenburg Line. Had this fact been earlier known, Gellibrand would almost certainly have sent the reorganised 5th Brigade along this route to make its second attack, as was now being done, by bombing. This effort, already begun, was the commencement of a struggle ranking with those of Munster Alley at Pozières, and Quinn's Post and Lone Pine in Gallipoli, as one of the stiffest bomb-fights in the experience of the A.I.F. General Smyth decided to employ the second reinforcing battalion, the 26th (Queensland and Tasmania) to assist this effort, and accordingly transferred the battalion to Brigadier-General Smith's control. But it had now less than two companies available, the remainder having been detached for carrying parties<sup>83</sup> or used in Gilchrist's advance. Lieutenant-Colonel Travers accordingly at once sent Captain Murphy's<sup>84</sup> company along the Central Road to O.G.I. As there came from the front a continuous call for bombs, rifle-grenades, and Stokes mortar shells, each platoon of this company was formed into a carrying party and loaded with these supplies, and on arrival all of them were sent back for more and, with the exception of the bombers, they continued to be so employed all day.<sup>85</sup>



Before this reinforcement arrived, a most gallant, spontaneous advance by the fragment of all brigades on the spot had succeeded in temporarily seizing 200 yards of the brigade's objective in the Hindenburg line. O.G.I. Headed by Gilchrist, the handful of

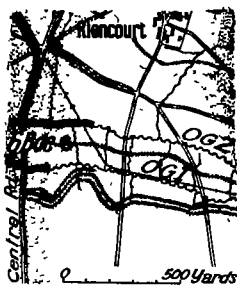
<sup>83</sup> Of 21 officers and 597 men with the battalion in the forward zone, only 15 officers and 375 men had been available at any time since the battle began, the remainder being thus detached.

<sup>84</sup> Capt. J. K. Murphy, M.C.; 26th Bn. Bank accountant; of Brisbane; b. Brisbane, 24 Feb., 1892.

<sup>85</sup> Each platoon had by dusk made four journeys.

mixed troops with Gilchrist and Irvine,<sup>86</sup> whose call for more men and bombs had been answered by Lieutenant Davies (18th) with 25 men of the 5th Brigade,<sup>87</sup> had vehemently attacked. None of the other officers and men present knew who their leader was, but for half-an-hour or more he could be seen, bareheaded, tunicless, in grey woollen cardigan, his curly hair ruffled with exertion, continually climbing out of the trench to throw bombs or to call to the men in shell-holes, begging them to charge the position in front while the trench party bombed up it.<sup>88</sup> The Germans were forced back past their strong-point at the entrance of cross-trench "G."<sup>89</sup> One of their machine-guns was captured and turned upon Riencourt. At more than one point in the advance a barricade was made.

But at some stage—no one could afterwards say precisely when—the grey cardigan and curly head were missed, and they were never seen or heard of again. About 7 o'clock, through exhaustion and shortage of bombs, the mixed party was driven back to the Central Road. This was to occur many times, and whenever it happened the small party of the 6th Brigade holding the end of O.G.2 was greatly endangered, the way being opened to the enemy to penetrate up cross-trench "G" and not merely fire on the 6th Brigade from its rear, but actually enter O.G.2 behind its bombers. In O.G.2 also the fighting had been severe, but the enemy had till now been held off with the help of rifle-grenades (which were reported by Captain Ellwood<sup>90</sup> at 8.20 to have "proved



<sup>86</sup> See pp. 447-8. The party included Lieutenant Flockart and Sergeant Temple (18th), the first to reach this trench, and men of each brigade of the 2nd Division—5th, 6th, and 7th.

<sup>87</sup> See p. 449. Lieutenant Smythe of the 24th most gallantly devoted to them part of his own small bomb-store, and charged one of his N.C.O's, Company Sergeant-Major E. J. Morcom (Bendigo, Vic.), with keeping up the supply.

<sup>88</sup> A little later, Lieutenant M. C. Drummond (Petersham and Leichhardt, N.S.W.), the intelligence officer of the 18th Battalion, succeeded in reaching from the rear the shell-holes in which Colonel Murphy and a number of men were lying in front of O.G.1. On learning the situation Murphy decided to attempt the rushing of the trench. On rising to make the charge, however, the gallant Drummond, a sergeant, and two men were instantly killed. Seeing others also fall, Murphy gave the order to dig in and hold on.

<sup>89</sup> Lieut. W. R. Porter (Vauluse, N.S.W.), 18th Battalion, was killed in this fighting.

<sup>90</sup> Lieut-Col W. H. Ellwood, M.C.; 24th Bn. School teacher; of Wunghnu, Vic.; b. Marungi, Vic., 19 April, 1889.

invaluable") and of a Stokes mortar of the 5th Brigade.<sup>91</sup> At 7.45, however, when this mortar had been withdrawn, probably for use in O.G.1, a German attack drove the guard in O.G.2 also right back to the road. It happened that Major Trew<sup>92</sup> of the 23rd Battalion, now senior officer forward of the railway line, had established his headquarters in this road, just short of the Hindenburg Line, and, grasping the gravity of the situation on this flank, had stationed odd parties of the 23rd along the road-bank facing eastwards where the two trenches crossed it. Captain Pascoe (23rd), who also was near by when the Victorians were driven out of O.G.2, at once barricaded the trench at the road-crossing, and sent urgently for a trench-mortar. The situation was critical, and at the headquarters of the 24th Battalion in O.G.2 a hurried council was held at which the young staff decided that the flanking posts must be held by stationing, at regular intervals behind each other, first bombers, then rifle-grenadiers, and then Stokes mortars. A Stokes mortar of the 6th Brigade under Lance-Corporal Mitchell was brought up from O.G.1. It had only ten shells, and so close was the enemy that it had to fire its shells almost vertically in the air in order to drop them on the target. But the Germans at once began to withdraw. A corporal of the 5th Brigade called for volunteers and, upon six offering, led them at once in a bomb attack on the heels of the enemy, and by shortly after 8 o'clock he had recaptured O.G.2 to its junction with Ostrich Avenue.

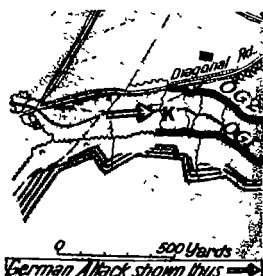


The struggle to secure the left flank in the Hindenburg Line had at last somewhat eased in its severity. It is true that the posts established beyond the Diagonal Road could not be maintained, since the Germans still held positions further down that road, towards Bullecourt, and, firing up it

<sup>91</sup> This had previously been firing along O.G.1 from where the entanglement crossed the Central road

<sup>92</sup> Major W. M. Trew, D.S.O.; 23rd Bn. Farmer and grazier, of Mansfield, Vic.; b. Stawell, Vic., 26 Jan., 1883. Died, 24 July, 1934.

into the backs of the men lining its northern bank, had quickly shot them out of it. Lieutenant Jennings had been killed as he walked down the road. Hunt, now thrice wounded, had begged Lieutenant Greig to be allowed to take another party and recapture the road, but seeing that he was in fainting condition Greig had refused and sent him to the rear. The left flank posts in O.G.2 under Lieutenant Thwaites and Company Sergeant-Major Horsburgh<sup>93</sup> accordingly remained on the near side of the road. About 6 o'clock a sentry had observed men between the two Hindenburg Lines approaching the flank and left rear of the post. At an early stage the sound of bombing further to the left had made it evident that some party of Australians or British had entered the trenches there,<sup>94</sup> and at first sight it was thought that the strangers, who were moving cautiously from shell-hole to shell-hole, might be some such party. When 100 yards away, however, they were seen to be wearing German helmets. A bombing party was accordingly hurried along cross-trench "K," which here connected O.G.1 and 2, and a post was formed in it commanding a view of both trenches.<sup>95</sup> At the same time the Lewis gunners and riflemen in O.G.2 opened fire. According to one account, the Germans entered cross-trench "K" near its southern end, but were quickly bombed out. This ended for the time being the fighting on the left in O.G.2.



In O.G.1 the left flank party under Captain Kennedy also had observed a party of their own side farther to the west.<sup>96</sup> After the first sharp struggle the Germans were

<sup>93</sup> Lieut. J. Horsburgh, D.C.M., M.M.; 21st Bn. Bridge-builder, of Melbourne; b. Pittenween, Fifeshire, Scotland, 7 Jan., 1887.

<sup>94</sup> This would be the party of the 21st and 22nd under Lieutenants H. N. Garton (Mooralla, Vic.) and C. H. Miller (Northcote, Vic.), which temporarily penetrated the Hindenburg Line on that flank (see p. 438). Lieutenant F. P. Selleck (Numurkah, Vic.), 24th Battalion, and Sergeant-Major Horsburgh, 21st Battalion, are said to have made special efforts to reach this party by bombing, but as their party progressed the sound of other bombing receded.

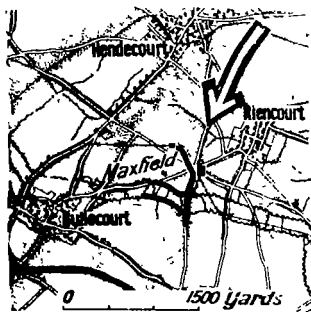
<sup>95</sup> The two trenches were separated by a slight curve of the land, and in some places one could not be seen from the other.

<sup>96</sup> Probably Captain V. C. Alderson's party close outside the German trench.

temporarily quiet, but, bombs having run low, no effort could at the moment be made to join hands with these Australians.

Thus at 8 o'clock the left flank in the Hindenburg Line had been temporarily established in both trenches, but the right was back to the road in O.G.1 and near it in O.G.2. Captain Savage, adjutant of the 24th, accurately described the situation as "somewhat serious."

The narrative must now return to Captain Maxfield with his thin line of advanced troops holding their niches in the bank of the tramline out at the second objective. The order of corps headquarters, issued at 7.3, not to advance beyond this point did not reach Major Trew until 9.45, and probably never reached Captain Maxfield at all. But so adverse were the conditions that most officers of the 23rd on the spot recognised that farther advance by their small unorganised force was out of the question.<sup>97</sup> At 6.50 Maxfield, who, so far as he knew, had with him at the tramway only 2 officers (Lieutenants Harris<sup>98</sup> and Rhynehart<sup>99</sup>) and 30 men,<sup>100</sup> observed, approaching round the north of Riencourt, 50 Germans; and within a short time 200 of them reached by this route the "artillery protection line," 300 yards to his front. His own force was growing mainly through the gradual dribbling forward of men of the 23rd Battalion over the fire-swept zone; at 7.15 he wrote that he was trying to collect as many as possible to repel a counter-attack "which



<sup>97</sup> When the delayed barrage moved forward at 6.30, one young officer, Lieutenant C. D. Fethers, asked Captain Pascoe, who was beside him, why they did not follow it. But to the seniors it had been obvious from the moment they reached the second objective that "something had gone wrong." Maxfield's first words to an officer of the 23rd had been: "We've got to dig in here." So slender was the force there that Maxfield did not at first even realise that the waves of the 23rd had come forward to him.

<sup>98</sup> Lieut. J. Harris, 24th Bn. Hairdresser; of Creswick, Vic; b Creswick. 1891. Killed in action, 3 May, 1917.

<sup>99</sup> Lieut. H. L. Rhynehart, 24th Bn. Ironmonger; of Albury, N.S.W.; b. Albury, 1890. Killed in action, 3 May, 1917.

<sup>100</sup> Part of the 23rd were, however, farther to the right, near the Six Cross Roads

will come any minute." By 7.40 he reported that he had 2 officers and 100 men holding a front of 360 yards<sup>101</sup> besides Lieutenant Desmond<sup>102</sup> of the 6th Machine Gun Company, who, in accordance with the original order, had come through to the second objective with two Vickers machine-guns and their attached carrying party, bringing ample ammunition.<sup>103</sup> Two Lewis guns also had arrived, of which one was quickly put out of action; but the other, and the two machine-guns, opening fire over the bank by the Six Cross Roads, only 450 yards from the edge of Riencourt, within half-an-hour shot down some 40 Germans and completely stopped all movement in their immediate neighbourhood except through trenches. One of the Vickers guns also was afterwards put out of action by fire from a German machine-gun. The other continued to fire, especially on German troops who could be seen filing from Riencourt to Ostrich Avenue with boxes of bombs.

Being certain that a counter-attack was imminent, Maxfield sent to headquarters of the 24th Battalion for reinforcements, and at 7.30 there was sent to him, with bombs and a Lewis gun, a platoon<sup>104</sup> drawn from the already tenuous garrison of O.G.I. Only a fragment of it got through to him. At about 7.50 a signaller, Robert Pettifer,<sup>105</sup> arrived with a telephone line, enabling him for a short time to speak to Captain Ellwood in O.G.2. He asked that the artillery should be warned to look out for his signal that the Germans were attacking, and meanwhile should "bash" the Artillery Protection Line and particularly two machine-guns in it, which were rendering movement at the tramway highly dangerous.<sup>106</sup>

<sup>101</sup> The second contact-patrol of the 3rd Squadron, R.F.C., flew over about 10 a.m. calling for flares. On the right, Captains Pascoe and Parkes (23rd) tried to light their flares, but found them too wet. They therefore waved the flags given to them to mark their position for the artillery. Pascoe saw the observer lean over the side of the machine, and said: "It's all right, Parkes, they've spotted us." Their line was duly reported by the 3rd Squadron to corps headquarters about noon.

<sup>102</sup> Lieut. R. D. Desmond, 6th M.G. Coy. Public servant; of Ballarat, Vic.; b. Ballarat, 25 March, 1891. Killed in action, 3 May, 1917.

<sup>103</sup> This party was supplied by the 24th Battalion. Of its original members, all except one reached the second objective and handed over 18 of their 20 belt-boxes. They then, as ordered, joined Maxfield's force.

<sup>104</sup> Under Sgt. R. Irving (Hawthorn, Vic.), 24th Bn.

<sup>105</sup> L/Cpl. R. T. Pettifer, M.M. (No. 4751; 24th Bn.). Sleeper-bewer, of Ballieston, Vic.; b. Nagambie, Vic., 22 Jan., 1895. (The line, though under machine-gun fire, was afterwards repaired by Private G. S. Primrose, of Boolarra, Vic.)

<sup>106</sup> Especially near the Six Cross Roads, where the bank ended. Man after man was hit crossing the exposed ground here.

Such was the position when, at 8.50, Captain Ellwood received on the telephone Maxfield's promised call for the artillery to lay down its barrage immediately beyond the Six Cross Roads. The Germans were counter-attacking not, as Maxfield expected, over the open, but down Ostrich Avenue. Here the post under Lieutenant Brewster at the barricade near the Six Cross Roads, firing rifle-grenades, kept them at distance and eventually drove them off. But back in the Hindenburg Line, in which the enemy attacked at the same time against both flanks, the fighting was more severe. At 8.45 the Germans laid across the Australian communications a heavy barrage which filled with dust and shell-smoke the space between the railway and the Hindenburg Line. Under this barrage he tried to bomb along the trenches. On the eastern flank, which he could reinforce without much interference, his attack seems to have met that of the last company of the 26th under Lieutenant Kerr,<sup>107</sup> who at 7.45, on receipt of the news of the loss of that part of O.G.1, had been sent to take up the bombing. This was the first close fight in which Kerr or the subaltern who assisted him, Lieutenant Gibson,<sup>108</sup> had taken part, but, assisted by the bombers of Captain Murphy's company,<sup>109</sup> they drove the enemy back past the remains of several earlier barricades and eventually, at a point 200 yards down the trench, they piled up a new barrier of sandbags and dead bodies. Kerr then handed over the position to the mixed party of the 5th Brigade under Lieutenant E. L. Davies, who throughout was mainly responsible for organising its defence, and led his own Queenslanders out into the Central Road for a rest.

They had been there barely twenty minutes when a call came from Major Trew of the 6th Brigade for a party to bomb up O.G.2. Kerr at once led his men round to that trench and, meeting the Germans about seventy yards from its mouth, bombed them back past cross-trench "G" and began the building of a barricade before again handing over the ground won. While the block was being made, however,

<sup>107</sup> Lieut. J. S. Kerr, 26th Bn. Clerk; of Brisbane; b. Rosewood, Q'land, 13 Jan., 1889.

<sup>108</sup> Lieut. J. O. Gibson, 26th Bn. Clerk; of Campbelltown, S. Aust.; b. London, 7 March, 1896. (Gibson was formerly a driver in the artillery.)

<sup>109</sup> See p. 455

Germans succeeded in entering the trench behind the foremost party, and Gibson and a few men found themselves engaged in a furious bomb-fight both to front and rear. Some of the Australians, including Gibson, ultimately escaped across the open to O.G.1, the remainder being killed or captured. The flank guard of the 6th Brigade in O.G.2 under Lieutenants Pickett and P.G.D.



Fethers<sup>110</sup> (of the 24th) was involved in this fighting. Fethers was hit on the head and rendered unconscious, but the guard held on near the mouth of the trench.

The German counter-attack on the right had thus failed. On the left flank in O.G.2, where the enemy could reinforce only over the open, no counter-attack of importance was received at this hour,<sup>111</sup> but in O.G.1 that flank was pressed strongly. Here Captain Kennedy and his handful of the 22nd had shortly before received some reinforcements,<sup>112</sup> and had thereupon attempted to bomb westwards and join the Australians whom he could see ahead;<sup>113</sup> but Lieutenant Filmer,<sup>114</sup> looking over the edge of the trench, was immediately killed, and the thrust was strongly opposed and stopped. It had, indeed, come up against an enemy preparing to counter-attack. The Germans, who here could draw reinforcements from Bullecourt, brought up "pineapple" mortars and twice drove back the Victorians, but were in turn repelled. Nevertheless bombing continued, and Kennedy was forced to hold on without the support of Stokes mortars, of which the five or six then in the captured position were all more urgently required elsewhere.

The counter-attack which had thus been defeated was no mere immediate local effort, but the first co-ordinated attempt

<sup>110</sup> Lieut. P. G. Denton Fethers, 24th Bn. Station manager; of Melbourne; b. Cranbourne, Vic., 20 Nov. 1894. Killed in action, 3 May, 1917.

<sup>111</sup> There seems, however, to have been a recrudescence of bombing and of fire from German *granatenwerfer*.

<sup>112</sup> Lieutenant Filmer (22nd) and a few survivors of his carrying party had arrived with bombs, and Lieutenant C. F. Robinson (Darnum, Vic.), also of the 22nd, with a few more men had come from O.G.2 through cross-trench "K."

<sup>113</sup> See pp 458-9

<sup>114</sup> Lieut. W. S. Filmer, 22nd Bn. School teacher; of Byaduk and Womerah, Vic., b. Noradjuha, Vic., 27 March, 1893. Killed in action, 3 May, 1917.

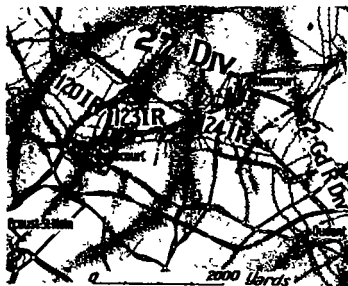


to retake the captured ground. That it was possible to undertake it so early was due to the fact that, as the attacking troops suspected, the enemy had fully expected and prepared for the Bullecourt offensive.

German narratives show that, although the Germans on this front attributed the quietude following the 4th Division's attack to dejection caused by that defeat, and although in the weeks that followed they saw few signs of British infantry patrols or of the making of trenches,<sup>115</sup> yet within a few days the marked increase of artillery-fire convinced them that the British had not given up their intention of attacking there.<sup>116</sup> Accordingly General von Moser, commanding the XIV Reserve Corps there, ordered the 27th Division, which held the threatened sector, to hand over the eastern part of its position to the 2nd Guard Reserve Division,<sup>117</sup> and to place the regiment thus relieved (the 123rd Grenadier) between the 124th and the 120th, as shown in the marginal sketch.

The grenadiers thus transferred to the south and east of Bullecourt did not welcome the change, the trenches there being worse and the strain more intense, but they recognised one important compensation in their new position—the existence (as their history states) of "roomy, fully-shellproof dugouts in exceptional number, which we owed to the labour of the 26th Reserve Division." Though the fighting zone became a uniform brown wilderness, these dugouts, "like islands of safety, remained undamaged." The only completed defence of the village was the front line around it—"if that was lost all was lost." Such part of the garrison as was not stationed in this, was kept in O.G.2 north of the village, where also were large dugouts, one of them known as "The Barracks" holding 80 men. When at the end of April there was observed a sudden quickening of the activity of the British aeroplanes and an increase of the bombardment, the "main part" of the Bullecourt garrison "sat in its dugouts, and, in spite of shells and trench-mortar bombs, preserved its freshness."<sup>118</sup>

In addition to this thickening of the garrison, the artillery had been reinforced, labour troops had been brought up to repair and extend the trenches, and the supports and reserves had been distributed



<sup>115</sup> *The History of the 123rd Grenadier Regiment* (the unit opposite Noreuil) says (p. 96) that the infantry opposed to it was inactive, and that it was only after the thrust of April 15 that "one saw it make scanty shelters and at isolated points erect wire-entanglements." No hostile patrols were sighted by the 123rd. The 124th (opposite the railway), on the other hand, found the patrol activity on both sides "extremely lively" (*History of 124th I.R.*, p. 70).

<sup>116</sup> The Crown Prince Rupprecht had been convinced of this ever since the 4th Australian Division's attack.

<sup>117</sup> The 2nd Guard Reserve Division was enabled to extend to the right, since the 3rd Guard Division (brought up at the time of the Lagnicourt raid) had just been inserted into the line on its left.

<sup>118</sup> The quotations are from the *History of the 123rd (Grenadier) Regiment*, p. 97.

in greater depth.<sup>119</sup> The 207th Division, an exhausted formation, arrived in the rear area for use, if necessary, as reserve. A company of the 1st Musketeer Battalion, armed with between twenty and thirty automatic rifles, was attached to each regiment of the 27th Division for special use against tanks. On May 2 the battalions on this front were fitted out for the first time with the new German light machine-gun, a weapon intended to play the same rôle as the Lewis gun, but much more cumbersome.<sup>120</sup>

On April 26 German aeroplanes detected camps for 5,000-6,000 men near Bapaume. The temporary decrease of artillery-fire had been observed, but so evident was the coming attack that every night from about the 26th onwards the German artillery laid down "strong harassing fire" on batteries, approaches, and probable assembly places between Ecoust and Noreuil, working up to a bombardment about dawn every morning to catch any preparations for attack. On May 1 (according to the history of the 124th I.R.) the artillery and aeroplane activity made it certain "that the day of attack was immediately imminent."<sup>121</sup> . . . . On the night of May 2-3 all information was unanimous. The attack comes to-morrow morning!"

At 3.30 on May 3 the German artillery laid down the bombardment ordered by the commander of the 27th Division<sup>122</sup>—"annihilation fire," which was to shatter the enemy infantry in its assembly positions." Under the short but powerful British bombardment which followed, the infantry of the Wurtemberg division undoubtedly maintained a high spirit, and was waiting and even eager, whenever the threatened attack should come, to eject any intruder by the same well-practised methods that it had successfully employed against the 4th Australian Division on April 11.

When the blow fell, the 120th I.R., west of Bullecourt, quickly regained from the 62nd Division all its trenches temporarily lost. The regiment next to it, the 123rd, also quickly cleared most of the trenches penetrated by the 62nd Division's attack. There is some reason for believing that this attack did not come upon them so swiftly as that of the Australians further east,<sup>123</sup> the tanks were smashed,<sup>124</sup> and the infantry pushing against the edge of Bullecourt were faced by "undismayed troops." The 11th company of the 123rd, brought up at the first alarm from regimental headquarters to the Artillery Protection Line, was put in at 5.30 to strengthen the right

<sup>119</sup> The line was variously held. The 124th I.R. (facing the Australians) had six companies in the front line, each with one platoon in the support line. The 123rd (around Bullecourt) had its I Battalion (four companies) in the front line, and its III Battalion in support. The 120th held its line in the same way as the 123rd.

<sup>120</sup> It was a modification of the heavy German machine-gun, water-cooled, but with a lighter barrel-casing, a rifle-butt, and a light tripod instead of the heavy tripod. It had a crew of four. It was intended at this time to "issue" three to each company. The German infantry would then be supported by, roughly, 8-12 heavy and 12 light machine-guns (including those of "sharpshooter" detachments) per battalion; the British infantry by 5 heavy (Vickers) and 16 light (Lewis) guns.

<sup>121</sup> General von Moser notes in his diary that day: "I am convinced this is the calm before the renewed storm. The Englishman is tough and revengeful."

<sup>122</sup> General von Maur.

<sup>123</sup> The red signals for barrage went up from the 124th I.R. some time before those of the 123rd (*History of the 123rd I.R.*, p. 97). The British infantry appeared to the Germans to rely upon its tanks.

<sup>124</sup> *The History of the 27th Division* says that eight tanks were smashed, and that three withdrew. It is also stated that the Germans had, since April 11, lost their fear of them.

and helped the 120th to clear the west of Bullecourt. But east of Bullecourt the 123rd found a situation which it could not clear up. Here the Australians had penetrated the line and were driving back the flank company (4/123rd) "more and more. . . . In spite of the desperate resistance of the 4th company, . . . its sector was at about 8 o'clock partly lost, and only by calling up its last ounce of strength could it stem the enemy's expansion. The company (says the regimental historian) here suffered inexpressibly, its casualties approaching complete annihilation—even on the first day it lost 24 killed, 9 missing, and 52 wounded, among them the company commander."

Farther east, south of Riencourt, the 124th was in a similar plight, its two right companies (9th and 10th) being driven out by the 6th Australian Brigade, while its centre and left (11th, 12th, 3rd, and 4th companies) held. It was these that beat off the two attacks of the 5th Brigade and resisted the early bomb assaults east of the Central Road. As, however, three of their bomb-dumps were blown up, the supply quickly ran short, and, although one of the support companies, the 2nd, brought up more, the German bombers could not hold their ground. "Our artillery," says the regimental historian, "constantly tried to barrage off the point of penetration and so prevent the enemy from bringing up reinforcements, but could not succeed." The Australians, who had pierced the line between the 123rd and 124th, "brought up very numerous machine-guns and also trench-mortars with which they enfiladed our trenches." The 2nd company was now put in to reinforce, and the 6th brought up to the Artillery Protection Line. "Nevertheless the English (*i.e.*, Australians), who this time made use of their auxiliary weapons—especially rifle-grenades—in exemplary fashion, continued to win ground step by step."

Thus east of Bullecourt the immediate counter-attack had failed; but other normal steps were then already in progress. General von Moser, awakened at 5 o'clock with news of the Australian penetration, had taken action. "We alarm our reserves," he notes, "direct our heavy fire against assemblies of troops behind the enemy front, send forward our fliers, and concern ourselves with artillery-fire from the neighbouring divisions."

The corps reserves were the III/120th in Sauchy Cauchy (7 miles from Riencourt), I/15th R.I.R. in Haynescourt (9½ miles), and II/Lehr in Raillencourt (9½ miles). The regimental supports were already engaged, and their reserve battalions on the move. The reserve battalion (II) of the 123rd was at 4 o'clock ordered to regimental headquarters and to the Artillery Protection Line, and the reserve battalion (II) of the 124th was at 6 o'clock set in march from Villers-lez-Cagnicourt (3 miles from Riencourt). Its 5th company, reaching Riencourt at once barred Ostrich Avenue.

The forces for a concerted counter-attack were thus brought up, and it began, according to German records, at 8.20. It took the shape of a deliberate attempt to repeat the movements by which the 4th Australian Division had been expelled on April 11. The 123rd I.R. was to bomb up the Hindenburg Line from the west, the 124th from the east, and the "storm detachment" of the 27th Division under Lieutenant of Reserve Bauer, brought up hurriedly in motor lorries, was to attack down Ostrich Avenue. For their flank attacks, the 123rd and 124th used chiefly the companies which they had brought from



gathered along the Central Road or stationed east of it in O.G.1, was harsher still; the shock of the early repulse and of its repetition had subjected them to an extreme test. At 9.30, on receiving a report that the troops in the 5th Brigade's objective east of the Central Road had again been driven out,<sup>125</sup> the divisional commander allotted for their support the last available battalion of the 7th Brigade—the 28th (Western Australia).<sup>126</sup>

It was not, however, until four hours later that this assistance was available, and in the meantime the 6th Brigade, which had penetrated nearly half-a-mile into the enemy's position on a front of only 500 yards, was faced with the almost hopeless task of holding its ground there. Gellibrand knew that the 185th Brigade on his left could not possibly assist; its right, if still in the Bullecourt trenches, must be precariously holding on, separated from the nearest Australian post by at least 1,000 yards of unsubdued enemy trench. Consequently, when there reached him through divisional headquarters a report that the 62nd Division's right was "bombing towards the Anzacs," he refused to regard as feasible the launching of a similar effort on his part.<sup>127</sup> But, unless the 62nd Division could advance, the maintenance of Maxfield's line so far forward at the tramway was useless and dangerous. That matter settled itself about 11 o'clock, when messages were received that the barrage, supposed to lie 200 yards beyond, was falling increasingly upon the troops at the tramline.<sup>128</sup> It was impossible for the artillery to avoid this occurrence; its guns on this day were called on to fire far more than ever before, in some cases more, indeed, than it would formerly have been believed a gun could safely fire. This day the average expenditure of shells for the 144 field-guns supporting the 2nd Division was over 400 per gun—

<sup>125</sup> This was probably a report of the situation before Lieutenant Kerr's attack.

<sup>126</sup> Brigadier-General Wisdom and the staff of the 7th Brigade remained in charge of the sector in front of Noreuil, immediately to the right of the battle-front, and reinforcing units from the 1st Division also passed through their hands.

<sup>127</sup> In the A.I.F. the expression "bombing towards the Anzacs" thus came to be a synonym for futile promises of assistance. Actually, according to an officer who reached Gellibrand's headquarters from the British flank shortly after this message was sent, the few troops of the 185th Brigade in the trench south east of Bullecourt were, when he left them, sitting along the trench.

<sup>128</sup> Lieutenant P. B. J. O'Reilly (Balmain, N.S.W.), 38th Battery, the forward observing officer for "P" group, who had gone forward with the infantry to O.G.2, himself observed this between 11.5 and 11.20, and asked for the range to be increased. O'Reilly was killed in O.G.2 at about 8 p.m. by a shell.

they had never previously exceeded an average of 270.<sup>129</sup> It is true that from the outbreak of the British barrage the German counter-battery fire upon the Anzac artillery stopped dead—the gun positions were almost free from fire for several days. But, with such overwork for guns and crews, short-shooting was inevitable.

Maxfield's force, out on the tramway, was the first to feel it. His losses by enemy fire were already severe: of his own two subalterns, Lieutenant Rhynehart had been killed trying to find some of the 22nd on his left; Lieutenant Harris had been mortally shot through the kidneys—he refused to be carried to the rear, knowing that this would involve needless waste of stretcher-bearers. Lieutenant Desmond of the machine-guns was killed by a shell from the supporting guns. Finally, Maxfield himself was badly wounded by a German shell,<sup>130</sup> and, handing over command of his company to Sergeant Whitear<sup>131</sup> (24th), started to make his way back to the Hindenburg Line. He never reached it.<sup>132</sup>

About that time the 23rd on the right had begun to dribble back along the Central Road, and Whitear therefore decided to bring back the 24th by twos and threes across the open from the tramline.<sup>133</sup> A machine-gunner, Private McDonald,<sup>134</sup> with whom only one member of the gun-crews now survived, covered the retirement for a while, and then brought away his gun.<sup>135</sup> Farther to the right Lieutenant Brewster (23rd), held on, as ordered, until the 24th were clear, and then withdrew his post from Ostrich Avenue. By 11.30 the second

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<sup>129</sup> The 10th Battery fired 3,100, an average of over 516 rounds per gun. The total expenditure for the corps was—field artillery, 70,730 shells, heavy artillery, 19,186.

<sup>130</sup> Cpl J. J. O'Gorman (Wangaratta, Vic.), beside him, was killed by the same shell.

<sup>131</sup> Lieut. A. E. Whitear, D.C.M.; 24th Bn. Hospital wardsman and chemistry student; of Bendigo, Vic.; b. London, 8 Jan, 1895.

<sup>132</sup> He was last seen alive in a shell-hole to which he was pinned down by German snipers. The position of the shell-hole was marked, but an endeavour to find it that night failed. Later, the body of an officer with the ribbon of the Military Cross was seen lying behind the hedge.

<sup>133</sup> These had to move as best they could from shell-hole to shell-hole till they reached the hedge of the Diagonal Road. A certain number came in after dark, and odd men who had been wounded were brought in as late as four nights afterwards.

<sup>134</sup> Sgt. A. McDonald, M.M. (No. 1799; 6th M.G. Coy.). Farmer; of Laen, Vic.; b. Moyston, Vic., 18 June, 1888.

<sup>135</sup> As he reached the hedge, the gun was pierced by two machine-gun bullets. He accordingly left it there, but brought in the spare parts. According to one report, a trench-mortar man, apparently wounded, was also at some time seen dragging his heavy gun back over the shell holes in front of O.G. 2. He eventually put a bomb beneath it. "He may not have got back," says this account, "but six trench-mortar shells did."

objective had been evacuated. By noon Gellibrand was able to bring back the barrage to protect the troops in the Hindenburg Line.

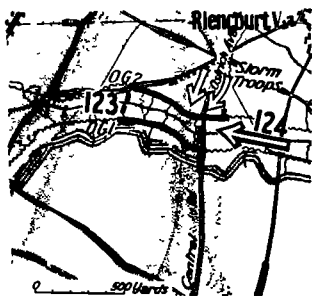
At this juncture, having received depressing reports of the condition of the troops, Gellibrand asked the commanders of the 23rd and 24th whether they could hold on in the Hindenburg Line.<sup>136</sup> Both were doubtful, but expressed the opinion that the reports were exaggerated. As a matter of fact, there had occurred a fairly general lull in the fighting. But during the last hour observers had seen lines of men making across the open on the right near the Moulin Sans Souci towards the Hindenburg Line. They were at first uncertain whether these might not be Australians falling back. About noon, however, Germans were seen congregating in the Hindenburg trenches on the right, evidently about to attack the flank posts. The enemy's shell-fire on the old No-Man's Land and on the railway increased, and this time the Germans attempted to attack from the front also. After approaching both through the Diagonal Road and through the now undefended Ostrich Avenue, they attempted to cross the open and frontally attack O.G.2. But the thin garrison, slightly strengthened by the remnants of Maxfield's force, was ready; the German artillery had thus far left the Hindenburg Line practically untouched, and the Victorians, standing boldly above the parapet, forced the oncoming line to ground. The Germans then commenced what was evidently a carefully practised method of advance, sliding on their stomachs like seals from shell-hole to shell-hole. The bravest, however, were stopped a dozen yards from the trench.

Attacking up the trenches on the right, the enemy had more success. In O.G.2 he rushed the barricade and drove back the mixed guard under Lieutenant Pickett (24th) past the entrance of Ostrich Avenue, down which the Germans also attacked. Lieutenant P. G. D. Fethers, who had regained consciousness and was again leading the fight, was killed, but Pickett and an officer of the 19th, collecting such men as they could, counter-attacked and recaptured the entrance. In O.G.1, on the other hand, the tired 5th Brigade was for

<sup>136</sup> Gellibrand himself had no doubts, but knowing the spirit of these young leaders he wanted to make it easier for them to inform him of their fears, if they had any.

the third time driven out to the road. Major Trew (23rd), in command in the forward zone, had been wounded while speaking on his telephone in the Central Road, but Captain Parkes (23rd), who took his place, reported to Captain Lloyd<sup>137</sup> of the 24th, who thenceforward exercised the forward command, that the fragments of the 5th and 7th Brigades which had been lining the road had now left that position without his knowledge;<sup>138</sup> he had insufficient men to protect the right flank, and he considered the situation "very critical." The Australian artillery, which had opened at 12.25 in answer to the German barrage, had been permitted by the divisional commander to cease fire thirteen minutes later, as the supply of shells threatened to run low; thenceforward its instructions were to restrict its general fire and wait for urgent demands (such as S.O.S. signals) from the infantry. Its observers, however, had perceived the German bomb attack on the right, and had turned two field-batteries upon it. The heavy artillery was already firing on it. But above all, as in almost every crisis of that day, the fire of the Stokes mortars, whenever they had ammunition, was of the utmost assistance, their powerful shells disorganising the German attack.<sup>139</sup> The counter-attack on the right spent itself without further success.

German narratives show that this assault at noon was a second general counter-attack, made in consequence of an order to repeat the attempt that had failed at 9 o'clock; it seems to have been undertaken by the same troops, except that two companies of the III/120th I.R. (from the corps reserve) were employed in carrying bombs to the eastern sector, and were eventually drawn into the fight there, and that the 12th company of the 123rd on this occasion attacked down Ostrich Avenue.<sup>140</sup> It is probable, therefore, that the force which attacked across the open, "seal" fashion, was the specially trained divisional storm-detachment.



<sup>137</sup> Lieut.-Col J E Lloyd, MC; 24th Bn; and commands 2nd/28th Bn, A.I.F., 1940. Analytical chemist, of Melbourne; b Melbourne, 13 April, 1894.

<sup>138</sup> This was apparently due to some of the tired men of the 5th Brigade believing that the 28th Battalion was relieving them.

<sup>139</sup> Several eyewitnesses mention one Stokes mortar shell which burst in O.G.2 and flung a German high into the air, his body turning over and over.

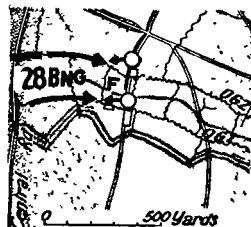
<sup>140</sup> The regimental history states that this company threw its opponents out of the trench near the Six Cross Roads. Actually, the trench had already been evacuated.



Before 2 o'clock the 28th Battalion (Western Australia) came up, company after company, fresh and carrying large supplies of bombs, along the Central Road.<sup>141</sup>

**The 28th  
Battalion takes  
over the right.**

Fifty boxes of bombs were now available there. By orders of the divisional commander, General Smyth, two companies were to attack the 5th Brigade's first objective in each of the two Hindenburg trenches, and thus for the first time the 6th Brigade was relieved from the heavy task of holding that objective in O.G.2 as well as its own. Major A. Brown of the 28th, who was placed by his battalion commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Read,<sup>142</sup> in charge of these operations, himself took station at the entrance of O.G.1 and sent Captain Montgomery<sup>143</sup> with two companies to O.G.2. The attack was launched immediately along both trenches. Each company had been organised into four bombing squads, each comprising two bayonet men to lead the way, three throwers, three carriers, and five rifle grenadiers. In O.G.2 the leading squad met a shower of bombs immediately after passing over the 6th Brigade's barricade beyond cross-trench "G." Captain Montgomery had arranged with Captain Ellwood of the 24th for the support of the Stokes mortar guarding that flank, and a call was now sent to it. The mortar shelled the position, but failed to suppress the German bombing. The squads continued to attack, but could not drive back the enemy who were holding with infantry and machine-guns not only cross-trench "F," but the Riencourt-Noreuil road behind it, at right angles to the line of advance. Thus in O.G.2 the Western Australians had eventually to fall back on the old barricade near "G."



<sup>141</sup> The delay of this movement was due to the fact that one company of the 28th had been detached for carrying ammunition.

<sup>142</sup> Lieut.-Col. G. A. Read, D.S.O. Commanded 28th Bn. 1917. Departmental manager and wool expert; of Fremantle, W. Aust.; b. Forbes, N.S.W., 8 May, 1884. Died 29 June, 1919. (Read was one of the younger commanding officers of the A.I.F., being 32 years of age. He had been adjutant to Colonel A. W. Leane, killed during the winter on the Somme. Without previous military experience, he had, in twenty-two months, risen from private to lieutenant-colonel.)

<sup>143</sup> Capt. A. M. P. Montgomery, 28th Bn. Accountant; of West Perth, W. Aust.; b. Launceston, Tas., 8 June, 1890.

In O.G.1, on the other hand, their effort met with brilliant success. Covered by a Stokes mortar—which, however, eventually had to be stopped through its erratic shooting—and by four Lewis guns stationed on the bank of the Central Road, the Western Australians advanced, seizing two bays of the trench at each rush. The corps observer, telephoning to corps headquarters from the spur beyond Noreuil, reported that he could see the bombers working in the open, rushing with great spirit along the parapet. After the attack had progressed 100 yards, an additional Lewis gun was placed out in a shell-hole south of O.G.1, to cover the further advance. The Germans were quickly driven as far as cross-trench "F," and the mouth of this was next captured and barricaded; but beyond that point the enemy's resistance stiffened. The next cross-trench lay just beyond the crossing of the Noreuil-Riencourt road, and here the Germans, as in O.G.2, held a line across the front at right angles to the main trench. Attack in the open was here out of the question in the face of their active machine-guns, and in the trench obstacles had been placed. The bomb-supply had also sunk to five boxes. Accordingly the Western Australians, having succeeded in capturing 450 yards of O.G.1—more than half the 5th Brigade's objective—stopped their advance pending the arrival of more bombs.

During this pause, at about 4 o'clock, the Germans counter-attacked down cross-trench "F" and succeeded in getting into O.G.1 behind the bombing party under Lieutenant Tye.<sup>144</sup> Wounded in three places by bayonets, Tye, together with one or two of his men, scrambled out of the trench and eventually, by creeping outside the parapet, reached the Central Road. As the Germans pressed on down O.G.1, Lieutenant Foss,<sup>145</sup> vainly facing them with his revolver, was killed.<sup>146</sup> Two British airmen in a machine of the 15th Squadron,<sup>147</sup> seeing

<sup>144</sup> Lieut. A. J. Tye, M.C.; 28th Bn. Assayer; of Norseman, W. Aust; b. Richmond, Vic, 1890. Killed in action, 21 Sept., 1917.

<sup>145</sup> Elder brother of Captain C. M. Foss, who led the first Australian raid in France, and was killed after capturing the Windmill at Pozières. (Lieut. H. C. Foss, 28th Bn. Farmer; of Babakin district, W. Aust.; b. Perth, W. Aust., 22 Nov., 1887. Killed in action, 3 May, 1917.) A third and older brother, Cpl. E. C. Foss, 11th Bn., was killed at Merris on 3 June, 1918.

<sup>146</sup> He was found there in the next attack lying with his empty revolver in hand, and a number of dead Germans in front of him.

<sup>147</sup> Attached to the V Corps.

the Western Australians pressed back, sent a "zone call" to the artillery, and, when it did not answer,<sup>148</sup> fired 500 rounds with their machine-gun at the enemy bombers; but by 5.30 the 28th had been driven back to the Central Road. Only an Australian machine-gun firing into the mouth of the trench prevented the enemy from emerging into that road behind the 6th Brigade.

At this juncture, in answer to an earlier appeal from Major Brown, a carrying party of the 5th Brigade arrived with a large supply of bombs. Many of these, however, were found to be lacking detonators. Brown requested the nearest officers of the 5th Brigade to have them adjusted, but they would not ask their worn-out men—who were under the impression that they had been relieved—to stay and undertake the work. A party of them whom Brown himself ordered to affix them gradually vanished when his back was turned. His own men had been shaken and needed rest before renewing the fight, but he finished the job with them, and then, putting in every man he had, even the unnerved and the slightly wounded, again attacked. Although the Württembergers, according to his report at the time, were still "fighting hard," the 28th drove them back, and at about 6 o'clock again reached the Noreuil-Riencourt road.

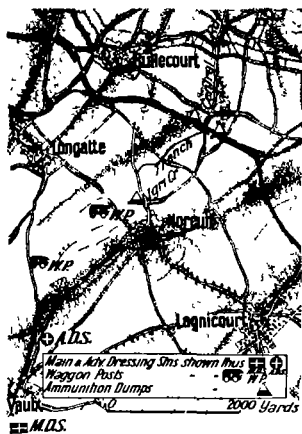
The 2nd Australian Division had thus been at least temporarily established in almost the whole of its first objective; but the position which it was holding by such desperate fighting—a narrow foothold at the head of a deep re-entrant—was not one which would ordinarily have been considered tenable. The nearest support for its garrison was at the railway embankment, three-quarters of a mile away, or at the sunken road close in front of that railway. The mushroom-shaped head of the position was sustained only by the one long stalk of the Central Road, reaching up far between

**Special  
difficulties in  
supply.**

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<sup>148</sup> The artillery was almost certainly prevented from firing by reports that the Australians held this trench

protruding enemy positions.<sup>149</sup> The ceaseless bomb-fighting called for immense labours on the part of carrying parties along this exposed route, and it was by these that, in a great measure, the battle was being fought. In rear of the railway the single avenue of approach was continued by the long trench dug on the previous night by the 1st Brigade. If the Germans lacked cover in reaching their forward area—and their narratives constantly emphasise the fact—their opponents were even more naked. Except for this single avenue and one or two sunken roads, all the approaches for the 2nd Australian Division for two miles back lay open to German observers. In this area the use of wheeled transport was practically impossible by day: one limber with urgently needed trench-mortars dashed to the



railway, and the horse ambulance waggons were most pluckily brought up, one at a time, in full sight of the enemy, to be loaded at the Noreuil-Longatte road. The loading post was shelled, at least one salvo bursting within a few yards of the waggon and of the wounded lying beside it, without causing those in charge of the work even to look round.<sup>150</sup> So extensive was the "carry" for the stretcher-bearers that this assistance was almost vital, but in the afternoon continued shelling forced the removal of the waggon-post for a quarter of a mile farther back. On no one did these conditions fall so severely as on the bearers of the field ambulances, who carried a mile and a half from the railway to the waggon-post, working in relays entirely across the open. Yet in nine hours 1,800 wounded—including an unusually high percentage of

<sup>149</sup> The advanced posts of the 7th Brigade across the old No-Man's Land on the right flank had been shelled out.

<sup>150</sup> Captain J. H. B. Brown (Newcastle, N.S.W.), 7th Field Ambulance, was in charge of the waggon-post, and was wounded there on May 4. Captain J. W. Farrar (Petersham, N.S.W.) was in charge of the advanced waggon-post throughout May 3.

severe cases—had been cleared from the main dressing station close behind Vaulx-Vraucourt, and the condition in which the wounded arrived at the casualty clearing stations called forth letters of admiration from the medical staff of the army, and from the commander of the 7th British Division and one of his brigadiers.

But these results were achieved and maintained only at a cost in casualties and strain comparable to that incurred by the infantry.<sup>151</sup> The supply of bombs and other ammunition also worked practically without hitch,<sup>152</sup> but the distance over which these had to be carried and the enormous demand necessitated the employment of a large proportion of the reserve infantry for carrying parties.<sup>153</sup> The 3rd Battalion (1st Brigade), which was now being brought up to the railway to replace the 28th, was at once put on carrying bombs, rifle-grenades, and trench-mortar shells to O.G.I. All these demands considerably affected the number of troops available for fighting. The reserve battalions that were already being drawn in, in all too quick succession, were mostly far below strength, having been recently involved in sharp fighting at Lagnicourt, Hermies, and Boursies. In addition each, before moving to the forward area, had left at the divisional "reinforcement camp" a third of its officers and a proportion of other ranks—particularly of Lewis gunners and other "specialists"—usually amounting to between 150 and 200. Further, on arrival at the railway, these units invariably suffered loss from the fierce bombardment that fell there and upon the sunken road close in front. It thus followed that

<sup>151</sup> The corps observer, Captain Osborne, who, till he himself was wounded, watched the line of bearers passing his heavily shelled observation post, wrote to Colonel C. C. Manifold expressing his admiration for the bravery and devotion of these men. The loss among them in eight days, May 3-10, amounted to nearly thirty per cent. The work began on May 3 with the bearers of the 5th, 6th, and 7th Field Ambulances (2nd Division), 2nd Field Ambulance (1st Division), and 14th Field Ambulance (5th Division). At 2 p.m. the bearers of the 3rd Field Ambulance also were called up from Bapaume.

<sup>152</sup> At 1 p.m. the 2nd Division ordered the supply of ammunition at Vaulx-Vraucourt to be quickened, and at 5 p.m. asked the corps ammunition park to quicken the supply of bombs.

<sup>153</sup> Thus, on May 6, when two brigades were in the line, the 1st Brigade carried from Igr1 Corner (at Noreuil) to its forward dump at the railway 2,300 Mills (No. 5) grenades, 3,216 rifle-grenades (No. 23), 50,000 rounds of small arms ammunition, 30 S.O.S. flares, 200 ground flares, 1,448 Stokes mortar shells, 1,600 sandbags, and other material. At least the same amount had to be carried from the railway to the Hindenburg Line. It may be assumed that on the same day the 3rd Brigade carried at least as much, the whole distance under shell-fire.

few of the reserve battalions entered the fight with more than 500 men, and some entered it with less. A company meant, at most, 110-120 men.<sup>154</sup>

The arrival of the 28th Battalion and the temporary gain of 400 yards to the right of the Central Road had considerably alleviated the danger of the 6th Brigade's position in its perilous foothold of 500 yards to the left of the road. Its responsible officers, both at the railway line and in the front trenches, were also much cheered by successive items of good news which began to pour in at midday, when the outlook was tending to appear almost desperate. First at 11.30 came a message from General White, who had been urging the V Corps to guard the left flank by securing part of Bullecourt, that the situation on that flank was more reassuring than had been supposed.<sup>155</sup> Second, at 12.28 came news that part of the 7th Division—a division with a particularly fine reputation throughout the B.E.F.—was to pass through the 62nd and attack Bullecourt; third, at 1.15 word arrived that the Third Army had taken Chérisy, only a few miles away to the left front. At the same time the divisional commander and brigadiers were informed by Birdwood that the 7th Division, which could not attack before 6 or 7 p.m., would, after seizing Bullecourt, endeavour to advance to the second objective. There must therefore be no question of falling back from the Hindenburg Line. The Australians must be prepared to retake their part of the second objective when the British pushed on to theirs.

The 6th Brigade was at this time stretching its thin ranks almost to breaking point in order to garrison the captured

<sup>154</sup> The 26th Battalion, when called on to support the fighting troops on May 3, had only 15 officers and 375 of other ranks available. The 3rd Battalion marched to the railway on May 3 with 17 officers and 543 others, but lost 2 officers and 60 others when employed in carrying ammunition during that day, and consequently had only 15 officers and 480 others available for relieving half of the 6th Brigade that night in O.G.2. The strength of the 1st Battalion, when it relieved in O.G.1, is given as 19 officers and 400 others. The 2nd Battalion entered the line on May 4 with 16 and 446—and so with most of the others. The 2nd Brigade, not having been involved in the previous fighting at Hermies, Boursies, and Lagnicourt, was considerably stronger than the others.

<sup>155</sup> This was probably based on some statement from the V Corps, but its grounds are not recorded.

position. By a distribution which stands as a model of good order, the staff of the 24th Battalion had reorganised its three remaining companies,<sup>186</sup> two in the front trench, one in the rear. The left flank at cross-trench "K" was held by the fragment of the 22nd<sup>187</sup> together with a few men of the 21st and 23rd; the right flank by the 28th in O.G.1 and 2, supported by the 23rd and a handful of the 5th Brigade which lined the eastern bank of the Central Road. This flank was further supported by several machine-guns, and by four Stokes mortars of the 5th and 6th Brigades, as well as by a light German *minenwerfer* which had been reconstructed by Lieutenant Robertson<sup>188</sup> and Corporal Scholfield<sup>189</sup> out of the damaged ones captured by the 24th Battalion, and which was now ranged on Ostrich Avenue. The left flank was supported by one mortar under Lance-Corporal Mitchell in O.G.2, and two machine-guns. Left of the Central Road the total garrison of the 6th Brigade in both trenches amounted only to 300. Seventeen fresh officers had been summoned from the reserve that had been left out of the battle, but had not yet arrived. Only by the utmost effort was the brigade holding on against the continued counter-attacks. At 3 p.m. Captain Kennedy (22nd) had to summon help from the 24th and from the neighbouring Stokes mortar to drive back the enemy on the left in O.G.1.

When, therefore, at 2.20 word was sent from brigade headquarters that, by direction of divisional headquarters, the 23rd and 24th Battalions must be ready to advance to the second objective when the 7th Division did the same, this order was obviously asking the impossible. Owing to the original failure of its left, the 6th Brigade had not yet even captured the whole of the Hindenburg Line allotted to it. Consequently at 4.15 General Smyth, after discussing the position with Gellibrand, modified these directions. The 6th Brigade was now to bomb down to cross-trench "L"

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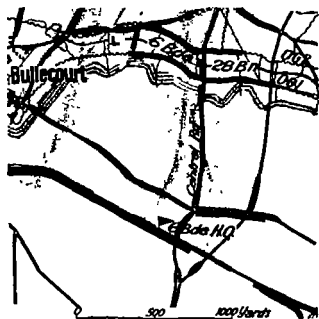
<sup>186</sup> The fourth, Maxfield's, had practically vanished.

<sup>187</sup> The left front and flank in O.G.2, though very weak in men, were exceedingly strong in Lewis guns. There are said to have been eighteen in that sector (one to each man in certain parts), each with ample ammunition.

<sup>188</sup> Capt. J. C. Robertson, M.C.; 6th L.T.M. Bty. Timber merchant; of Geelong, Vic.; b. Geelong, 28 Oct., 1894.

<sup>189</sup> Lieut. T. H. Scholfield, M.C., M.M.; 6th L.T.M. Bty. Farmer; of Telangatuk East, Vic.; b. Telangatuk East, 9 May, 1894.

by 6 o'clock. The subsequent advance, if it took place, would be carried out by two fresh battalions. For these, the divisional infantry having now been used up, General Smyth drew upon the 1st Brigade (1st Division) which lay behind him as his reserve. As a defensive measure, the 2nd Pioneer Battalion, which from the early afternoon had been digging a communication trench along the Central Road to O.G.1, was now ordered to help the infantry on the flanks by constructing strong-points there. The pioneers, however, had not men available for both works, and their senior officer, Major Donnelly,<sup>160</sup> after obtaining the advice of the infantry commanders in the front line, continued the work on the communication trench.



Probably even Gellibrand did not at first realise quite how much the modified order for attack demanded of the 23rd and 24th Battalions, which were to furnish the parties to bomb down O.G.2 and O.G.1 respectively. It was, however, sweetened by one ingredient that made it acceptable: if this final task was accomplished, those two battalions would be relieved—in O.G.2 by the fresh troops, and in O.G.1 by the 21st and 22nd.

It was after 5 o'clock when this order reached the front line. At 5.40 Captain Parkes (23rd), safeguarding the right flank along the Central Road, reported that the 28th Battalion had again been driven by German bombers back to the Central Road: did Gellibrand still wish the 23rd to undertake the bombing attack on the left, which must necessarily be delayed?<sup>161</sup>

<sup>160</sup> Lieut.-Col. J. F. Donnelly, D.S.O., V.D.; 2nd Pioneer Bn. Member of Aust. Permanent Forces; of Bungendore, N.S.W.; b. Bywong Station, Gundaroo, N.S.W., 28 June, 1885.

<sup>161</sup> The 23rd at this time reported details of the strength of the 6th Brigade in the captured position (as gathered by its adjutant, Captain E. T. Bazeley) as follows:—

24th Bn.	..	8 officers, 123 others.
23rd Bn.	..	8 officers, 90 others.
22nd Bn.	..	4 officers, 25 others.
21st Bn.	..	2 officers, 45 others.
Total	..	22 officers, 283 others.



He did. Accordingly, the 24th Battalion undertook to provide the bombing parties in each trench, the 23rd, however, sending a supporting party to O.G.2.<sup>102</sup>

While bombs, rifle-grenades, and Stokes mortar shells were being amassed for this attempt, the Germans made a third co-ordinated counter-attack, chiefly against the right flank in the Hindenburg Line. In both trenches there—in O.G.1 for the third time—the 28th Battalion was driven out; the artillery had been informed, and laid its fire on the German supports and avenues of approach, and two trench-mortars of the 7th Brigade, which had opportunely arrived at 6 p.m., opened fire at their shortest range. With this support the 28th again thrust back the enemy in both lines. The Germans had also attacked the left, using in O.G.1 a *flammenwerfer*, but this instrument had been kept at a distance by rifle-grenades; in O.G.2 they could not cross the Diagonal Road. Just before sunset (which came at 8.7 p.m.), the 6th Brigade launched its bombing attack westwards along both trenches, a Stokes mortar first firing overhead down each trench.<sup>103</sup> In O.G.2 Lieutenant Scales<sup>104</sup> (24th) attacked with three parties,<sup>105</sup> one in the trench beyond the Diagonal Road, a second down the road, and a third across the shell-holes south of it. The two latter were stopped by machine-gun fire, but the first captured and held the trench to within 100 yards of cross-trench "L." The corresponding point in O.G.1 was reached by a party under Lieutenant Gow<sup>106</sup> (24th).

German accounts show that on the eastern flank the third general counter-attack was launched at 6.5 p.m. by the 4th and 6th companies of the 124th I.R. (all of whose companies were now engaged), and the remnant of the divisional storm troops under Lieutenant of Reserve Bauer. The two last companies of the III/120th had meanwhile been brought up, apparently into support. On the left the 5th company of

<sup>102</sup> When Gellibrand issued the order for this attack, the commanders of the 21st and 22nd Battalions, whose headquarters were at the railway, protested that their men already held the sector west of cross-trench "L" which was to be attacked. Gellibrand accepted the contrary information received from the headquarters of the 24th in the Hindenburg Line, that the flank lay at or near "K"; but he sent the two battalion commanders forward with orders to correctly ascertain the position and to act accordingly. With them went several of the officers who had been brought up from the nucleus.

<sup>103</sup> Shortage of bombs for this mortar had delayed the attempt. The barricade established after the attack was covered by a Stokes mortar throughout the night.

<sup>104</sup> Capt J. L. Scales, D.S.O., M.M., 24th Bn Contractor; of Mitta Mitta, Vic.; b. Mitta Mitta, 25 July, 1895.

<sup>105</sup> The supporting party of the 23rd was led by Lieut. H. C. Holland (Maryborough, Vic.).

<sup>106</sup> Lieut W. B. Gow, M.C.; 24th Bn. School teacher; of Harrierville, Vic.; b. Harrierville, 28 May, 1893.

the 123rd Grenadier was thrown in at about 7 o'clock. The counter-attack on the right temporarily succeeded, but Bauer was wounded, and shortly afterwards the counter-attacking troops reported themselves driven out by an English attack which occurred at 7.30 "on the whole front" (this evidently represents the German interpretation of the several disconnected attacks and the subsequent bombardment).

Dusk was now fast closing in. At 6.10 General Smyth had issued the 2nd Division's order for the night. The trenches were to be held—on the right by the 28th Battalion and 5th Brigade, and on the left by the 6th Brigade. The latter was to co-operate with the 7th British Division's attack, but would be relieved in O.G.2 before midnight by two battalions of the 1st Brigade, which, with the 5th Brigade, would advance to the second objective when the 7th Division did so. These orders, however, became impossible of performance almost before they were issued. In the first place, the 28th Battalion, which since 2 o'clock had borne the whole weight of fighting on the right, was exhausted. No sooner had it retaken O.G.1 than at 8.15 it was driven out again, largely by the fire of German trench-mortars. Most officers of the 5th Brigade to whom Major Brown had appealed for reinforcement had been unable to furnish it, but he had eventually come upon Lieutenant Davies (18th), who since dawn had, in effect, been commanding the men of that brigade in the forward area.<sup>167</sup> Davies had immediately telephoned for more men, and ultimately there reached Brown sixty of the 5th Brigade who, as he reported, were "ready to do anything."

It was by then almost dark. The newly-arrived reinforcement was divided into four bombing squads under Lieutenants Frewin,<sup>168</sup> Sowell,<sup>169</sup> and other officers, and Frewin's squad was already moving into O.G.1 when, at 8.45, there suddenly descended on the whole area immediately in rear of the Hindenburg Line a heavy German bombardment. During this storm of shell-fire Lieutenant Sowell reported to Major

<sup>167</sup> With or near Lieutenant Davies had been, among others, Lieutenants A. W. Irvine, H. J. Flockart, W. R. Porter, V. J. Frewin, and L. Layton-Smith (19th).

<sup>168</sup> Lieut. V. J. Frewin, 18th Bn. School teacher; of Gosford, N.S.W.; b. Gosford, 13 June, 1889. Killed in action, 15 April, 1918.

<sup>169</sup> Lieut. H. K. Sowell, 18th Bn. Clerk; of Guildford, N.S.W.; b. Ashfield, N.S.W., 27 Jan., 1894. Killed in action, 3 May, 1917.

Brown that he could see a number of men *south* of the trench, advancing from the enemy's direction towards the Central Road. This looked like a bold attempt to cut off the whole of the advanced force. The S.O.S. was fired, and the Australian barrage and that of the supporting heavy artillery was at once laid down close in front of the captured position. On the left flank, which had already been troubled with short shooting, the immediate result was that a number of light and heavy shells fell on the section of O.G.2 newly captured by the 6th Brigade on the left. The post beyond the Diagonal Road was shelled out of it, and some men and an officer of the 6th Brigade came back from O.G.2 along the Central Road to O.G.1. This was possibly an authorised movement, but Major Brown was told by one of his officers in O.G.2 that the 6th Brigade was falling back, exposing his rear. About the same time Brown had received a message from his battalion commander cautioning him against allowing his companies in O.G.2 to be cut off.

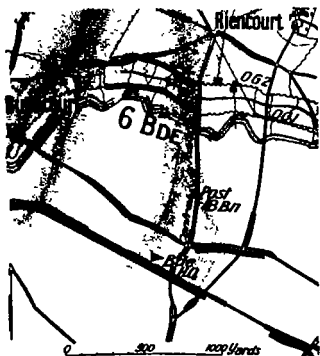
Major Brown was no back-line warrior. He had held the windmill crest at Pozzières, and had rallied the troops at Flers and been wounded when personally leading an audacious attempt to retrieve just such a desperate situation as the present. But, with his men worn out, the left apparently retiring, and the enemy reported to be threatening the Central Road behind him, he decided that the position could be no longer held, and ordered the 28th Battalion and the fragment of the 5th Brigade to withdraw down the Central Road. His order, passed along, was questioned by Lieutenant Irvine of the 18th, who had been fighting there since dawn, and by others, but was confirmed, and the whole remnant of the 5th and 7th Brigades withdrew—except one man.

Commanding one company of the 28th was a youngster, gentle in voice, manner, and appearance, who had been attached for a while to Gellibrand's staff, Captain Jack Roydhouse. He refused to believe that the 6th Brigade was retiring, and, leaving his own battalion, hurried to O.G.2 where he found every man in his place and the young staff of the 24th Battalion still controlling the situation in their headquarters' dugout. Half in tears, Roydhouse told his old messmates that his own battalion and all other troops had

left them. The trenches on their right and the road behind them were unguarded and open to the enemy. He himself had come to stay with them.

Captain Lloyd was furious—the whole effort of that long day was being thrown away by the withdrawal of the supports. A council of war was instantly held, and these young spirits decided that, desperate though the position was, there would be no precautionary retirement. The enemy must surround them before they would withdraw; then they would cut their way through.

So the 6th Brigade held on, alone, in the Hindenburg Line, facing the enemy in front, and on both flanks, throughout the night. The order to retire had reached its ranks also, but none of its men had acted upon it—they refused to retire unless ordered by their own officers to do so. When Lieutenant Pickett<sup>170</sup> reported O.G.2 on the right deserted, Captain Ellwood led a dozen men into the empty trench, and placed two at the abandoned barricade in Ostrich Avenue and the rest farther on.<sup>171</sup> Near O.G.1 Captain Parkes stationed posts of the 23rd at two points on the otherwise deserted Central Road.



It was in this extreme test that the work of Gellibrand in this brigade achieved results, unrecognised indeed except by a few who were aware of them, but beyond parallel in the history of the A.I.F. No other battle fought by Australian infantry was to quite such an extent a personal triumph for any commander. Not only had his situation at the railway given him by far the greatest share in its direction; not only had he risen to every situation, almost always correct in judgment where his colleague in Noreuil and the divisional staff in Vaulx had been frequently misled. His tactical

<sup>170</sup> The same who had led the troops into O.G.2 east of the road at dawn. He had been wounded at 9 a.m.

<sup>171</sup> These first held the block just beyond Ostrich Avenue. Later, when the 24th Battalion's pioneers were brought up, the old block beyond cross-trench "G" also was held. Six men were then stationed at each of the three barricades.

judgment—which sometimes, as in the first action at Noreuil, seemed strangely unpractical—may here too have erred when he sent forward the rallied 5th Brigade without barrage across the open.<sup>172</sup>

But the instrument which he had forged—the 6th Brigade—was answering the test in a manner which surpassed the hope even of its exacting creator. Despite the battering and overstrain, its battalions or fragments of battalions were working with the unison of a machine. Bonds formed long before in hours of training and of relaxation—through the medium of cheery little dinners with his chief subordinates, by caustic hints, “leg-pulls,” thoughtful courtesies, or (when necessary) by grim truth-telling and slave-driving—were now holding like tempered steel. The little staff, reared together in Bohemian simplicity,<sup>173</sup> was now, despite a bombardment that battered out of shape its wretched dugout, working steadily like the gallant heart of an indomitable engine, despatching party after party carrying precisely the material most needed at each urgent moment. Two of its young members had leapt to the head of the officerless 5th Brigade and died leaving behind a tradition imperishable in the A.I.F. But others who had shared that frugal mess were in the Hindenburg Line. Eight months before one of them,<sup>174</sup> watching (as he afterwards said) the heavy German shells “shovelling in” K Trench at Pozières, had plunged into and through it on an errand, driven by one thought: “The old man expects it.” The officers whom Gellibrand had picked and trained had picked and trained their subordinates in the same way, and were now obtaining a similar response. Along the battered parapet of O.G.2 the tiny scattered posts looked out over the crater-field at the German flares rising from

<sup>172</sup> The orders, however, both of Brigadier-General Smith and of the divisional commander appear also to have envisaged only this method. Gellibrand subsequently refused to adopt it in the case of the 25th Battalion.

<sup>173</sup> This continually afforded surprises and even shocks to those who were unaccustomed to Gellibrand's methods. For example, before this battle a staff officer from the neighbouring British brigade, clattering down the stairs of Gellibrand's cramped dugout in the Noreuil-Longatte road, and at their foot confronted with a figure lying rolled in a blanket on a small table, asked “Where shall I find the brigadier?” “I'm he,” said the figure, turning round. “What do you want?” “I beg your pardon, sir, I wanted to speak to your brigade-major. Could you tell me where he is?” “I keep him under here,” said Gellibrand, pointing under the table, between whose legs Major Plant was curled up on the ground, snatching, like his chief, a short rest from the strain of preparation.

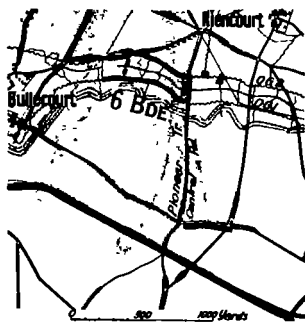
<sup>174</sup> Captain Savage. The orderly who plunged with him into that storm he never saw again.

the Six Cross Roads and falling over their heads. At no time of the day had it been possible for them to rest in the dugouts—men were far too few. But, weary to death, they were still determined to beat their enemy.

At intervals throughout the night bodies of Germans could be seen moving near Riencourt and in the Diagonal Road close in front of the captured trenches. Whenever there appeared such signs that the enemy might attack, the call to "stand-to" came from the men themselves. Captain Savage tells of two whose bayonets had been blown off their rifles, running from one post to another to replace them—they must have bayonets for this work! Another was firing with German rifles and ammunition, with a collection of German bombs beside him and his own rifle carefully covered for use in emergency. Men could not be spared for stretcher-bearing—the wounded made their own way to the rear "unless absolutely mangled." One man with a fragment of shell in his lung reached the railway before he fainted; a corporal with a piece of metal in his knee carried another man out. The medical officers at the railway were working steadily throughout the tornado, but the firing line became crowded with men with ghastly wounds. Savage tells of one whose entrails were showing through a gash in his abdomen, but who lay smoking a cigarette. To Savage's "Stick it out, lad," he answered "Don't worry about me, sir, but give the bastards hell!" Afterwards he shot himself by placing a rifle between his feet. "The men (says Savage) had one notion only—'it doesn't matter at what cost, we're going to beat them!'" Officers—in particular, those of the 24th—were consciously working to the standard their brigadier had set them. Their reports throughout were based on his maxim: "I want the truth, but don't get your tails down."

One trial the garrison was spared. Although the German barrages on the Central Road and the area close behind the line were constant and on the railway exceptionally heavy; although the troops in support behind the railway banks always suffered, and the timbers of Gellibrand's small shelter changed their position with the continual pounding overhead: yet, except for some shelling by their own artillery and the occasional fire of German trench-mortars on the flanks, the front-line troops suffered little bombardment. One other

comforting factor was that, by a magnificent effort of the 2nd Division's pioneer battalion lined out along the Central Road under Major Donnelly, the communication trench was by 9 p.m. dug through from the railway to the Hindenburg Line, 1,150 yards. This trench, fringed by the dead bodies of many of the pioneers who made it, ran along the eastern side of the road, immediately beneath the bank. Henceforth the Central Road was no longer a road but "Pioneer Trench."<sup>175</sup>

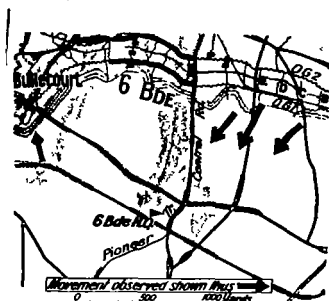


At Gellibrand's headquarters on the railway, the S.O.S. signal at 9.15 had been seen and was repeated. But the first intimation of the withdrawal of the 28th Battalion was the sight of a number of its men streaming across the railway to the rear. At the same time troops were seen moving on the extreme left in front of the railway near Bullecourt, and the report arrived that the Germans were attacking from there also. It was assumed that the enemy was endeavouring to pinch out the 6th Brigade. The railway was hurriedly lined by such troops as were there; Gellibrand himself, rifle in hand, helped to rally the 28th, who readily answered any suggestion.<sup>176</sup> Colonel Travers of the 26th hastily gathered a mixed force—350 men of the 22nd, 26th, 28th, and 5th Field Company—to defend the left flank near Longatte.

<sup>175</sup> The digging of this trench was one of the finest achievements of the Australian pioneers. At 11.10 a.m. the battalion (then at Noreuil) was ordered to dig a trench along the Central Road. Lieutenant-Colonel F. W. G. Annand (Brisbane) accordingly sent forward a company under Major J. F. Donnelly (Bungendore, N.S.W.) and half-a-company under Captain L. C. Roth (Elsternwick, Vic.; died of wounds on 6 Oct., 1918) to dig from the railway to O.G.1, and, later, half-a-company under Captain G. D. Shaw (Kalgoorlie and Perth, W. Aust.) to cut a similar trench from O.G.1 to 2. Shaw's half-company—like all other troops that went to O.G.1 that day—was incidentally made use of to carry ammunition from the railway. A platoon which, under Lieutenant A. H. Traves (Northgate, Q'land), had been carrying stretchers at the medical collecting station at Vaulx-Vraucourt, was also sent up. Working from about 2 p.m. until 9 p.m., under shell-fire, and continually hampered by carrying parties using the half-dug trench, the pioneers had by 9 o'clock finished 1,150 yards of trench between the railway and O.G.1, and 200 yards between O.G.1 and 2.

<sup>176</sup> On his call: "Here, men, that isn't the way to the railway!", they turned at once

No attack, however, developed, and by 11 p.m. the artillery of both sides had subsided. Inquiries made after the battle showed that the report of attack from Bullecourt was mistaken; the movement seen there was part of the preparation for the 7th Division's attack. Evidence gathered still later cast doubt on the reported attack from the right also. All day in front of the Hindenburg Line on that flank as far as cross-trench "B" there had been lying in shell-holes a considerable part of the 5th Brigade. The few officers and men who, with Captain Taylor of the 19th, had reached the listening sap at cross-trench "E," and who twice had driven off with bombs attempts by the enemy to oust them,<sup>177</sup> had seen the bombs of the 28th bursting nearer and nearer, but always too far to make a junction possible. At dusk the bombing receded out of sight, and Captain Taylor accordingly, after sending away the wounded, brought back the remnant of the party.<sup>178</sup> In front of all parts of the German line on this flank the same thing was happening. The Germans seeing movement, and fearing attack, called down their barrage. The Australians at the mouth of O.G.1 interpreted the same movement and the accompanying barrage as a German attack, and in turn called down the Australian barrage. For more than an hour both artilleries churned up the battlefield.



Available German records do not mention the final driving out of the 28th Battalion—on the contrary, they state that "measures could now only be directed at preventing the enemy from extending his position." It is evident that the Germans throughout the night believed the Australians to be in possession of the ground won by the 28th at 7.30. The trenches east of the 6th Brigade's posts therefore remained empty.

<sup>177</sup> On one occasion the Germans used a trench mortar. Taylor's party had been provoking them by sniping at those passing down cross-trench "E." A British 6-inch howitzer also was throwing its shells into this cross-trench and was seen to blow a German sniper high into the air. In the listening sap Lieutenants C. W. Davies and J. Cant were both killed early in the day.

<sup>178</sup> Then numbering about ten. Taylor and Sergeant A. W. Carter (Moree, N.S.W.) themselves, bringing up the rear, carried away Private H. E. Mitten (Balmain and Tighe's Hill, N.S.W.) mortally wounded in the thigh. The Germans saw the retirement and shot down the first man to leave, but working from shell-hole to shell-hole the majority got clear. (Carter was blinded later in the fight.)



The counter-attack at 6 had exhausted the German effort for that day. Summarising its result, the historian of the 27th Division says: "During the whole day repeated attempts of the 124th I.R. to retake the lost trenches in bomb-fighting, as on April 11, came to nought, chiefly through the effect of long-range rifle-grenades the use of which was pre-eminently understood by the enemy. Even the storm detachment of the division . . . could only achieve temporary success. When the tried troop-leader, Sergeant-Major Hinderer, had fallen and the detachment leader, Lieutenant of Reserve Bauer, had been badly wounded, we had, late in the afternoon, to give up the attempt, and, after eighteen hours' bitter and close fighting, leave the elements of trench in the hands of the enemy." At 9 o'clock a fresh order was issued by the divisional commander directing that a new counter-attack should be made on the morning of May 4. Meanwhile, throughout the night, the German artillery-fire was thrown behind the "English" line in order to render difficult the work of supply and reinforcement.

Through these hours the 6th Brigade stood steadily along its trenches, its skeleton posts on the right watching the previously abandoned barricades. They were still there when, at 1 a.m. on May 4th, there began to arrive the first companies of the relieving battalions,<sup>179</sup> the 3rd (New South Wales) filing into O.G.2 and the 1st (New South Wales) into O.G.1. At the headquarters in O.G.2 the staff of the 24th handed over to Lieutenant-Colonel Moore of the 3rd. By 3 o'clock the 6th Brigade was filing out of the trenches. As it was leaving, the Germans suddenly counter-attacked, without previous bombardment, up the Hindenburg Line on both flanks. The 6th Brigade stood fast and helped the fresh battalions to beat off this fourth co-ordinated attempt. It was easily done on the right, but only after half-an-hour's heavy fighting on the left.

Then, tired, unkempt, reduced in numbers but bursting with pride, the 6th Brigade came out. Its men looked for no recognition of their victory, and none awaited them. No special congratulations met them, no high commander picked them out for special approbation. Indeed the higher commanders knew little of what the brigade had done. Its four battalions came back into close reserve from which, reorganised as four companies of a single battalion, they daily helped others to secure the foothold they had seized.

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<sup>179</sup> The 5th Brigade also had during the night stationed a post far down the Central Road.

But their achievement won a tribute which they would have prized beyond all others. An officer of the 2nd Battalion records that his incoming troops, forced to trample on the dead crowded in those narrow trenches, were at great pains during that day to avoid stepping on any whose sleeve carried the red and white patch of the 24th Battalion. "We understood that it was they who took this position," he says simply.<sup>180</sup> The 6th Brigade's achievement on this day had few parallels in the history of the A.I.F.<sup>181</sup> In the whole line of battle, from Vimy to near Quéant, theirs had been almost the only success. On their immediate flank a brigade (22nd) of the 7th Division<sup>182</sup> had at 10.30 p.m. made a strong attempt with two battalions to secure Bullecourt, but had failed.<sup>183</sup> Farther north, along the front of the Third Army, the forces which in the first advance had reached Chérisy, Fontaine Wood, and the outskirts of Roeux had been driven back by the inevitable counter-attacks. In the whole sixteen miles of battle-front, except for one minor gain south of the River Scarpe, the only troops who on the morning of May 4th still held any substantial part of the ground won were the 1st and part of the 6th Canadian Brigades at Fresnoy, on the extreme left flank of the offensive, and the 6th Australian Brigade on the extreme right.

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<sup>180</sup> Also a British airman, flying very low over the headquarters of the brigade on the afternoon of the 3rd, dropped a message: "Well done, Australia!"

<sup>181</sup> The Landing, the capture of Lone Pine, and the holding of the head of Monash Valley by the 4th Brigade are the achievements most nearly analogous to it.

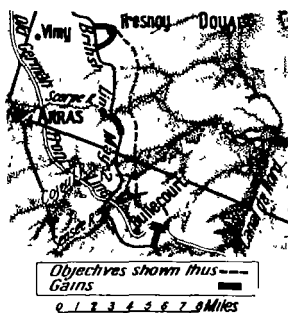
<sup>182</sup> The 7th Division at 6 o'clock took control of the sector previously held by the 185th Brigade (62nd Division). The 62nd Division remained responsible for the rest of its original front, farther to the left. The 185th Brigade temporarily left one of its battalions (2/7 West Yorks) under control of the 22nd Brigade.

<sup>183</sup> The troops employed were the 2nd Battalion, Honourable Artillery Company, and the 1st Battalion, Royal Welch Fusiliers—the 2nd H.A.C. on the right was to connect with the Australians, and the 1st R.W.F. on the left with the 62nd Division. The Hindenburg Line (O.G.1 south of Bullecourt) was taken after heavy hand-to-hand fighting against the enemy whose dugouts, in the dark and dust, were most difficult to find. The troops had been split up in crossing the crater-field and broken wire, and were driven out at midnight. A few of the 2nd H.A.C. who had pushed on into the village remained there, resisting all attempts at capture, until May 7, when they were rescued by the British.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE SECOND BATTLE OF BULLECOURT (II)

WHEN day broke on May 4th nothing was more certain than that the two isolated remnants—at Bullecourt and Fresnoy—of the ground gained on the 3rd would be vehemently counter-attacked. At Fresnoy the Canadians had succeeded in gaining touch with the British on their right, and with their own line on the left; but the Australians east of Bullecourt held a small patch at the head of a gulf in the Hindenburg Line of which the Germans held both sides. The position was of no local tactical value—was, indeed, much the reverse—except so far as its tenure might assist further British efforts by hampering the enemy's defence of Bullecourt. But the fighting assisted Haig's endeavour to hold the enemy, and it provided almost the only encouraging news of the great battle of May 3rd that could appear in the next day's *communiqué*. On the other hand—as one Australian was told by a staff officer of Major-General Russell of the New Zealand Division who happened to be down from Flanders visiting General Birdwood—



If we (the I Anzac Corps) are not supported by an extension of the line, we are sure to be put out. Generals Birdwood and White quite expect us to be put out.

The first necessary step was, obviously, to dispel the constant threat to the left rear by capturing Bullecourt. This was again attempted by the 22nd Brigade (7th British Division) at 4.30 a.m. on May 4th,<sup>1</sup> and the two fresh battalions employed succeeded in temporarily seizing part of

<sup>1</sup> Originally this was the hour arranged for the second phase of the 22nd Brigade's attack—the advance beyond Bullecourt. The first phase, however, having failed, was again attempted at that hour.

the German trench south and west of the village. Information, however, soon ceased to come back, and it seemed probable that this attack also had failed. At a conference with General Gough Birdwood made it clear that, unless Bullecourt could be captured, the Australians could not hold on.

The commander and troops of the 7th Division fully recognised the need, but the conditions in Bullecourt were extraordinarily difficult, approximating to those at Mouquet Farm in the First Battle of the Somme. The place had been so battered that the trenches were barely recognisable, and the German garrison relied entirely on the deep dugouts. The general positions of these, covered as they now were with heaps of *débris*, were difficult to find even for the German guides who nightly led up the reliefs or the carrying parties with food and ammunition. The food supply was irregular and the inmates of the dugouts lived partly on rations found in the haversacks of the British dead. The dugout entrances were frequently closed by successive bombardments, so that the garrisons had to crawl out or even dig their way. The Germans both here and on the left of the Australians, where they occupied similar positions, no longer manned their trenches by day or night, but posted sentries above the dugouts while practically the whole garrison remained below. Even in the crucial hours of dawn they stood to arms not in the trench, but at the stairs of the dugouts, ready to rush from them upon the appearance of an attack. They thus escaped much of the loss and strain of the bombardments, and, being troops of high morale, issued promptly to meet the attacking British who, in the dark and dust, inevitably broke into small parties and could seldom make sure of reaching and guarding all dugout-entrances before the garrison emerged. Very soon the intruders would find the fire of machine-guns and trench-mortars coming from several enemy nests in the crater-field.

A British officer, who was sent forward during the morning of May 4th to obtain news, succeeded in getting into the village from its western side. He reported finding signs of fierce fighting—the dead lying thickly along parts of the battered trenches and down the dugout stairs. As there were also signs that parties of British troops remained in the

village,<sup>2</sup> it was decided to send at dusk on May 4th large patrols of the same battalions to join hands with these. These patrols, however, were met by heavy fire as they approached the village, and the attempt failed.

Meanwhile the Australians could assist themselves by extending their 600 yards' foothold so as to secure more room for taking up the shocks of the enemy's counter-attacks. It was hourly becoming more probable that the battle would be a protracted one, and the hope of the long-promised rest "after the 2nd 'Divvy' had done its stunt" was now vanishing into thin air. The first three battalions of the 1st Brigade (1st Division), which originally had been lent to the 2nd Division against the more or less remote chance of its support being needed, were already in the trenches. The 3rd Brigade (1st Division), camped near Bapaume or working on the rear line of defence, had been warned; and at 3.30 on the previous day General White had telephoned to General Hobbs of the 5th Division, then preparing for the divisional horse-show and athletic sports at Albert, telling him to have one brigade ready to entrain at Albert at four hours' notice.

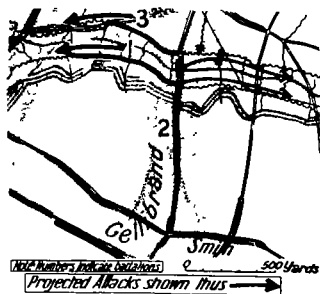
While keeping their comments to themselves, the Anzac leaders were resentful of what seemed to them the mismanagement<sup>3</sup> which, after promising the divisions their rest, was dragging them back to the line for this profitless, unintended struggle. Fierce bomb-fighting along the Hindenburg Line would wear down the reinforcing troops quicker than any other form of warfare, and the prospect was now (as an Australian diarist noted on May 6th) that of "an almost endless vista of brigades put in to hold this impossible position." To meet the need for early support and to avoid, if possible, the necessity of using the 5th Division, Birdwood arranged that the 2nd Brigade (1st Division), which had been lent to the 2nd Division for holding Lagnicourt, should be relieved by a brigade of the new 58th (London) Division, which had just reached the Fifth Army. The 2nd Brigade could then follow the 1st and 3rd, if required, in holding the Hindenburg Line.

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<sup>2</sup> One near its centre and one near the south-eastern corner.

<sup>3</sup> It was felt that if the army commander had restricted his objectives to those easily obtainable—for example, to the capture of Bullecourt and the Hindenburg Line *west* of it—the offensive could have been completed in one clean-cut successful attack.

Although the troops now holding the Hindenburg Line were entirely those of the 1st Brigade, control of their operations to the left of the Central Road was still with Gellibrand at the railway, and, of those to the right of it, with Smith. Both brigadiers had received during the night orders to attack, Gellibrand's troops, the 1st and 3rd Battalions, being ordered to bomb westwards down the Hindenburg Line with the object of assisting any successful advance by the 7th Division; Smith's (2nd Battalion—with the promised addition of the 4th) were to bomb eastwards to the point where the Hindenburg Line crossed the crest of the Noreuil-Riencourt spur—and so to secure the original first objective of the 5th Brigade. General Smyth (2nd Division) had withdrawn the 5th and most of the 7th Brigades—the former to Bapaume, the latter to the Beugny-Ytres line—but the 6th Brigade was held by him in close support<sup>4</sup> and constituted for the moment the only close reserve. It was therefore arranged that the two foremost battalions (11th and 12th) of the 3rd Brigade should be brought forward by noon and allotted as reserves, one for each brigadier.<sup>5</sup>



The leading troops of the 1st Brigade had arrived only just in time. The fourth general counter-attack,<sup>6</sup> which the departing 6th Brigade had helped them<sup>7</sup> to resist, had been seriously intended. Of the attempt upon the left in O.G.2, held by the newly-arrived 3rd Battalion, the commander of the flank post, Sergeant Kinchington, has recorded:

On my platoon's left O.G.2 ran into a sunken road.<sup>8</sup> I had put an observation post in this, behind a barricade; immediately behind it, but on top [i.e., on the road-bank where the trench opened into it], I

<sup>4</sup> In the sunken road between Noreuil and Lagnicourt.

<sup>5</sup> They were to relieve that night the units of the 1st Brigade in both Smith's and Gellibrand's sectors. This plan was afterwards changed.

<sup>6</sup> At 4.30 a.m., May 4.

<sup>7</sup> This help was given chiefly on the right, from the Central Road.

<sup>8</sup> The left had evidently come back somewhat. During the subsequent German attack, the bombing came so close to the trench-mortar manned by L/Cpl. J. Mitchell and Pte. T. J. O'Reilly (6th Brigade) that they blew it up. It was later replaced. (1816 Pte. T. J. O'Reilly, M.M.; farm hand; of Coburg, Vic.; b. Coburg, 5 June 1898). The right flank mortar and captured *minenwerfer* (still worked by Cpl. Scholfield) were holding back Germans attacking up Ostrich Avenue.

had mounted a Lewis gun and also a German machine-gun found in the trench. We also found over twelve dozen egg-bombs, which came in very handy as they went farther than the Mills.

After all the men had stood down [after standing to arms at dawn], I saw about 150 Germans coming down the road. They did not have any rifles. I got all the men to stand to, and said, "Don't fire till I tell you." I got alongside the machine-guns. When the Germans were about 40 yards away I saw a fellow shoot a jet of flame into the bank. It was the first *flammenwerfer* I had seen. I fired and shot the carrier through the belly; my machine-guns let them have it hot and strong; my bullet went through the *flammenwerfer* can, and it caught fire at the back. You could hardly see for smoke. There was a hole in the road; the man fell into it, and about a dozen men on top of him—they all appeared to catch fire. Bombs fell thick and heavy—this was where the egg-bombs came in. The nearest German reached five yards from the post in the road; my platoon killed over 80 in the road alone—we counted them."

In the left of O.G.1, held by the 1st Battalion (New South Wales), the Germans also attacked with a *flammenwerfer*, but were quickly repulsed, leaving five dead.

On the right the 2nd Battalion (New South Wales), which was later to bomb up the trenches from which the 28th had been driven out, had filed up "Pioneer Trench" (the Central Road) at dawn, relieving, as it came, some posts of the 5th Brigade. The 2nd temporarily occupied Pioneer Trench from O.G.2 almost to the railway, and while the troops were waiting there or sitting with their backs against the road-bank, Sergeant Telfer<sup>10</sup> strolled up O.G.1. Some distance along it he pulled from a dugout two dazed and exhausted men of the 2nd Division, evidently a remnant of the old flank guard. On his return with them, his platoon commander, Lieutenant Wharton,<sup>11</sup> pushed out with him again along O.G.1. It was still dark, and although they could hear voices of men in some of the dugouts they found this sector of the trench itself empty. After making their way for 200 yards over the bodies—German and Australian—which thickly carpeted the trench, they approached cross-trench "F," and ran suddenly into a German force obviously advancing to attack. Telfer threw some bombs into their midst, killing several. Survivors of the German party fell back on those following, and the two Australians had time to hurry back, bombing the dugouts as they went, and warn their company and the

<sup>9</sup> According to the battalion's report, the number was 30. One German was captured. (Kinchington's narrative has been slightly edited for the sake of clearness.)

<sup>10</sup> Lieut. S. N. Telfer, D.C.M.; 2nd Bn. Coppersmiths; of Sydney. b. Sydney, 5 Jan., 1895.

<sup>11</sup> Lieut. L. Wharton, M.C.; No. 4 Sqn., Aust. Flying Corps. Science master; of Armidale, N.S.W.; b. Parkes, N.S.W., 2 April, 1891.

neighbouring company of the 1st Battalion, which had a flank post on the Central Road.<sup>12</sup>

The German attack now came down O.G.1 with a *flammenwerfer* leading, and with the flanking parties converging on O.G.1 from the open on either side. The post of the 1st Battalion in Pioneer Trench (Central Road) under Captain Somerset<sup>13</sup> was somewhat out of the line of the projected flame, and, scrambling into the open, Somerset hurled bomb after bomb into O.G.1. In the dark the enemy did not know where to throw in reply. Five of them were killed, the *flammenwerfer* put out of action, and the head of the attack beaten in. Meanwhile Sergeant Telfer had directed the fire of a well-sited machine-gun upon a second wave of Germans coming across country in support. Within half-an-hour the counter-attack was beaten off, and Wharton and Telfer established a post across O.G.1 fifty yards east of the Central Road. In O.G.2, in the confusion of a night relief, no post had been maintained, and that trench, like O.G.1, was now held only at its exit to the Central Road.

According to German records, this counter-attack had been timed for dawn. It was to be made along O.G.1 from both flanks, so as to cut off the Australian garrison, and was to be preceded by short but heavy artillery preparation. On the eastern flank it was undertaken by the III/120th I.R.<sup>14</sup> (formerly divisional reserve), assisted by *flammenwerfer*, and by "assault-troops" of the 124th (the place of the III/120th in the support had been taken by the I/15th R.I.R., also from corps reserve). On the western flank the attack was made by "assault-troops" of the 123rd, also with *flammenwerfer*. The 123rd, after fighting the British all night in Bullecourt, was almost exhausted, and had as yet no support from the corps reserve. Its 8th company was brought up, but the attack, made at 3.30, failed—"the enemy (says its historian)<sup>15</sup> sat too wide and deep in the divisional sector for it to be possible to throw him back simply with *stoss-trupps*."<sup>16</sup> On the eastern flank<sup>17</sup> 250 yards of trench (which, though the Germans did not know it, were empty) were "won back"; "but the nearer the *flammenwerfer* came to the point of penetration the more the resistance strengthened; also the *flammenwerfer* was rendered ineffective by the absence of a trench (the trench-walls had been battered down by shells) to support it, and the enemy, scattered among shell-holes, offered too many points of attack. Trench-mortar bombs and rifle-grenades kept the assault troops at such a distance that hand-grenades remained ineffective."

<sup>12</sup> Before Wharton got back, Germans had entered the trench behind him, and he had to leave it and reach the Central Road by going across country.

<sup>13</sup> Capt. C. W. H. R. Somerset, M.C.; 1st Bn. Farmer and grazier; of Esk, Q'land, b. Caboonbah, Q'land, 24 Jan. 1896. Died, 20 Feb., 1936.

<sup>14</sup> Commanded by Oberleutnant Schmid. He was killed in this attack.

<sup>15</sup> History of the 123rd I.R., p. 100.

<sup>16</sup> Assault-troops.

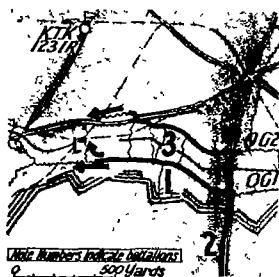
<sup>17</sup> The history of the 124th I.R. says that the operation here began at 3.15 a.m.



Four general attempts to oust the Australians had thus failed. Opposite the breach a new German front was taking shape, with its flanks in the Hindenburg trenches to east and west; the Australians could now detect a few isolated strong-points in the open or in sunken roads, with the Artillery Defence Line some distance behind them. In the Hindenburg Line on either flank the German garrison was sheltered in numerous successive dugouts. With close supports and reserves in Riencourt, Hendecourt, Cagnicourt, and Villers-lez-Cagnicourt,<sup>18</sup> the position of the Germans was obviously secure, and it is possible that they would have abandoned the notion of further counter-attack if the intrusion into their lines had been less impudent. As it was, they decided to renew the effort that evening, but in this they failed to calculate on their opponents' action in the meantime.

At 1 p.m. bombing parties of the 1st and 3rd Battalions, which had been organising throughout the morning, attacked<sup>19</sup> down the two Hindenburg trenches on the left. In O.G.2 the 3rd Battalion was supported by the flanking mortar of the 6th Brigade which, as the attack progressed,

bombarded post after post of the enemy.<sup>20</sup> But the bombers found stubborn resistance with machine-guns and stick-grenades. They had now passed the crest of the low tongue on the left, and were fighting downhill into a depression commanded by several enemy posts. The 3rd Battalion's bombing sergeant and several of its N.C.O's, who went forward to help the fight along, were killed or wounded. The attack stopped, the men being disinclined to advance, but upon their company commander, Captain Elliott,<sup>21</sup> personally leading them, they reached the neighbourhood of cross-trench "L."<sup>22</sup> In O.G.1



<sup>18</sup> The history of the 123rd Grenadier Regiment notes as astonishing the "slight depth" of the opposing artillery-fire which, until a late stage, left this village almost untouched, although it "swarmed with troops".

<sup>19</sup> The warning order for this attack (to extend to trench "L") had been given by Gellibrand at 6.20 a.m. But the operation eventually began before brigade headquarters intended.

<sup>20</sup> At one of these several German officers looked over the parapet just as a Stokes mortar shell burst behind them, and it was believed that the shot had disabled a battalion staff.

<sup>21</sup> Capt. C. F. Elliott, M.C.; 3rd Bn. Graizier; of Walcha and Moree, N.S.W.; b. Walcha, 24 Jan., 1889. Died 28 Aug., 1931.

<sup>22</sup> O.G.2 was here wrongly shown on the maps as almost continuous; actually there was a wide gap in it due to its recrossing the Diagonal Road, and also meeting a section of the old field-tramway.

the 1st Battalion's party under Lieutenant Richards<sup>23</sup> reached the same cross-trench, gained touch with the 3rd Battalion along it, and then bombed fifty yards farther along O.G.I.<sup>24</sup>

The history of the 123rd Grenadier Regiment indicates that this thrust caused great anxiety to that unit, on whose flank it fell. The flank was held by a mixture of four companies,<sup>25</sup> including the remnant of the 4th which, when this fight ended, had lost 98 out of a "trench strength" of 110. The regiment had now used all its supports, and (according to its historian) the 3rd Australian Battalion nearly reached "the great dugout," where the Diagonal Road crossed one from Bullecourt to Hendecourt. In the latter road was the forward headquarters of the regiment,<sup>26</sup> and at this stage orderlies and batmen were hurriedly summoned to defend headquarters. That road, however, was not attacked. The regiment was now "all mixed up,"<sup>27</sup> but it garrisoned the cross-trench next to the Australian flank, facing east.

The left flank had thus been extended to a point 725 yards from the Central Road. The attack east of that road, originally intended to start at dawn, was first postponed until 10, and then had to wait for the field batteries in Noreuil valley to register carefully on the trench—it being particularly desired by General Smyth that the operation should be covered by artillery fire. Each section (two guns) of the batteries detailed for the task was allotted fifty yards of trench, and the fire was to be lifted at the rate of fifty yards every three minutes to let the bombers advance.

During the whole morning, while these arrangements were being made, the 2nd Battalion, which was to head the attack up both O.G.I and O.G.2, waited along Pioneer Trench (the Central Road)—but not entirely inactive. Across the open to the left of Pioneer Trench not far from the disabled tank (No. 6) in the Hindenburg wire, a wounded man was observed waving a bandage or handkerchief. The troops next

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<sup>23</sup> Lieut. T. J. Richards, M.C.; 1st Bn. Commercial traveller (and a well-known international footballer); of Charters Towers, Q'land, and Manly, N.S.W.; b. Emmaville, N.S.W., 8 April, 1883. Died 25 Sept., 1935.

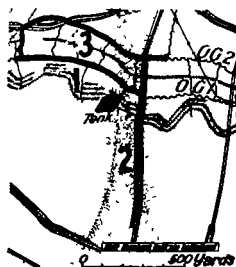
<sup>24</sup> The 1st Battalion reported that it had killed 27 of the enemy, and taken 16 prisoners. The 3rd Battalion lost fairly heavily, but the 1st had only 6 casualties.

<sup>25</sup> The 4th company had been reinforced, first by part of the 10th and later by the 5th and 8th.

<sup>26</sup> Known to the Germans as "K.T.K." (Kampftruppenkommando), headquarters of the "fighting troops". "B.T.K.", the headquarters of the regiment's supports (Bereitschaftstruppen), and "R.T.K.", headquarters of its reserve troops, were farther back.

<sup>27</sup> Its last remaining reserve, its 7th company, had been brought up to the Artillery Protection Line

saw two of their own stretcher-bearers climb out and walk over to pick him up. As they did so, German riflemen and a machine-gun to the left front of the captured position opened fire on them. With the bullets pecking the dust all round them, the stretcher-bearers (Privates Ringland<sup>28</sup> and Johnson<sup>29</sup>) laid the man on the stretcher and began to carry him back, when one of them (Ringland) fell. The other laid down the stretcher and bent over his mate, but found him dead. A third stretcher-bearer (Private Carlson)<sup>30</sup> was then seen to climb from Pioneer Trench, run across to the little group, ignoring the fire which was kept up, take the dead man's place and bring in the stretcher.<sup>31</sup>



This journey of the stretcher-bearers had also been observed by other wounded men, Victorians, who were sheltering in craters from the German sniping. One after another was seen to put his head above the crater-rim and wave a hand or a stick in hope of succour. The substitute stretcher-bearer, Carlson, immediately went out again, three times, under heavy fire, and each time carried one of them in. He then noticed a living man among the numerous dead to the right of the road, in front of the part of O.G.1 still held by the enemy. This proved to be an elderly man with a smashed thigh. While Carlson was bandaging him, another stretcher-bearer (Private Paul<sup>32</sup>) set out to help them, but was shot dead. Under very hot fire from snipers and a machine-gun, Carlson was carrying the wounded man back from shell-hole to shell-hole, when he himself was hit by a bullet in the hip and

<sup>28</sup> Pte. H. E. Ringland (No. 1177; 2nd Bn.). Clerk; of Stanmore, N.S.W.; b. Bermagui, N.S.W., 4 Aug., 1896. Killed in action, 4 May, 1917.

<sup>29</sup> Cpl G. V. Johnson, M.M. (No. 4346; 2nd Bn.). Shop assistant; of Newtown, N.S.W.; b. Newtown, 26 Apr., 1889. Killed in action, 11 Sept., 1918.

<sup>30</sup> Cpl A. L. Carson, D.C.M. (served as 1733, A. L. Carlson; 2nd Bn.). Rigger; of Rozelle, N.S.W.; b. Balmain, N.S.W., 2 May, 1893.

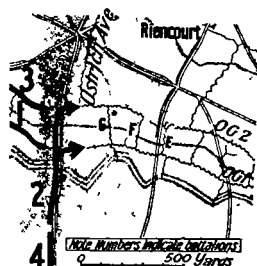
<sup>31</sup> According to one contemporary account the wounded man was a German; on the previous day in this area the enemy had turned a machine-gun on German prisoners being taken to the rear. Johnson begged his officer to be allowed to go out, urging that he could not see the wounded lying out without making an attempt to help them. Ringland volunteered to go with him.

<sup>32</sup> Pte J. Paul (No 5745, 2nd Bn.) Farm hand; of Condobolin, N.S.W.; b. Shielhill, St Fergus, Aberdeenshire, Scotland, 24 April, 1892. Killed in action. 4 May, 1917.

the wounded man was hit again. Carlson, however, could still crawl, and, dragging his comrade by the arm, reached Pioneer Trench.<sup>33</sup>

The sight of these actions—though they were merely in consonance with the tradition of Australian stretcher-bearers, established at the Landing and adhered to throughout the war—not only (as Colonel Milligan remarked) “did the battalion a great deal of good,” but made its members bitterly resentful, for there could be no question that the Württembergers knew what they were shooting at. About noon, however, it was remarked by stretcher-bearers that fire from O.G.1 east of Pioneer Trench almost entirely ceased. The silence was almost uncanny, and it was accordingly decided that instead of beginning its attack from the Central Road, as had been intended, the 2nd Battalion should at once move along the two trenches until it met opposition, and then arrange to attack from the point so reached.<sup>34</sup>

At 2.15 the 2nd Battalion entered each trench. Officers and men were in the keenest fighting spirit.<sup>35</sup> The bombing teams in O.G.2 found Germans not far up Ostrich Avenue, but after half-an-hour's fighting these had been thrust back for eighty yards, and the trench well blocked, and the leading company (Lieutenant O'Connell's<sup>36</sup>) moved on towards cross-trench “G,” which proved to be strongly held. In O.G.1, in which the enemy had attacked in the morning, the Germans were known to be in position west of this cross-trench. The advance in both



<sup>33</sup> These actions obviously merited the highest military award, and this was recognised by the commander of the 1st Brigade, Brigadier-General Lesslie. But a rule had been made that mere saving of life was not to constitute grounds for the award of the Victoria Cross. This rule should not have applied to stretcher-bearers, but, probably through a mistaken application of it by some higher authority, that reward was not granted.

<sup>34</sup> The fact that the enemy's absence was accidentally discovered by stretcher-bearers affords no reason for shooting on them. If they had not previously been shot at, the retirement—if there was one—would not have been remarked.

<sup>35</sup> The native confidence of the troops had already been heightened by their striking success at Hermies on April 9. The battalion had also caught the spirit of a particularly fine young commander. As it was coming forward on May 3, a friend had remarked to Colonel Milligan upon the battalion's “hard luck” in losing the rest that it had been hoping to enjoy. “Not a bit,” was the reply. “We must do something towards finishing such a well made plan.”

<sup>36</sup> Lieut. J. F. O'Connell, M.C.; 2nd Bn. Salesman; of Forbes and Vacluse, N S W; b. Bathurst, N.S.W., 7 Sept., 1890.

trenches was therefore stopped until 3.30, at which hour, according to arrangements now made, the artillery barrage would be laid down on both trenches from "G" eastwards.

At 3.40, as the barrage gradually lifted, the same companies attacked. The bombers worked with great dash. The Mills grenades, as always, were much more deadly instruments than the German stick-grenades (which were merely thin canisters filled with explosive and fitted with long wooden handles),<sup>37</sup> but were outranged both by them and by the small German egg-bombs. The New South Welshmen countered this disadvantage by keeping close up to the German throwers, most of whose bombs thus went over and burst in an empty bay behind the Australian bombing party, doing (as one officer said) little damage "except filling the place with smoke and smell and bits of tin." Behind this empty space came the Australian bomb-carriers and the relays of throwers ready to take the place of exhausted men. The supply of bombs up the trench never failed,<sup>38</sup> but rods for rifle-grenades ran short, and the progress of the artillery barrage was much too fast for the bombers.<sup>39</sup>

Thus in O.G.2, where the advance was not assisted by trench-mortars, the bombing party had to rely mainly upon its own hard fighting. Lieutenant O'Connell and, later, Lieutenant Moy<sup>40</sup> of the second company fought, practically stripped to the waist, revolvers in hand, beside their sweating team in the foremost bay, Moy throwing bombs with his disengaged hand and pulling out their pins with his teeth. Whenever, after each prolonged tussle, the German bombs seemed to be falling less thickly, the forward party seized its chance, rushed round the traverse into the next bay, killing any German that faced it there, and began bombing anew over the next traverse at the forward end of the bay. The fighting was bitter; sometimes Germans in dugouts, which had been passed, fired up the stairways until subdued. At

<sup>37</sup> They were hardly dangerous beyond the range of their explosion, whereas fragments of a Mills bomb could wound and kill at a distance.

<sup>38</sup> They were sent forward by carrying parties organised by 1st Brigade Headquarters. The 2nd Battalion thus established a large supply in O.G.2 before the operation began.

<sup>39</sup> The more distant artillery barrage on the German communications was, however, a valuable assistance.

<sup>40</sup> Major J. M. Moy, M.C.; and Bn. Grazier, of Wentworth, N.S.W.; b. Mannanarie, S. Aust., 17 Jan., 1886.

about 4.15, as the leading company tired and its progress gradually slowed and stopped, Moy brought the second company to the head of the attack. The Germans, who fought stubbornly throughout, could now be seen bringing reinforcements from Riencourt across the open towards the Hindenburg Line farther east, and as these arrived a German officer was coolly distributing them at right angles to the attack. O'Connell, aiming a rifle at him, was himself at once hit in the arm. About the same time Moy was wounded in the knee. The Australian fire, however, dispelled any threat of counter-attack.

According to the historian of the 124th I.R., a counter-attack was made at this juncture by part of the 15th R.I.R., brought from Riencourt.

At this stage, about 5.15, the 4th Battalion, which had been gradually filing up after the 2nd along Pioneer Trench into O.G.1 and 2, but was not—according to the original plan—to have taken part in the bombing, began to reinforce and relieve the teams of the 2nd as they tired, and eventually took their place. The 4th reached cross-trench "F," but was unable to capture the junction, and there, in O.G.2, the advance ended.

In O.G.1 the two other companies of the 2nd Battalion had forced their way past cross-trench "G." Lieutenant Wharton's teams, with that keen young spirit, Sergeant Telfer, in charge of the throwing, and two fearless "bayonet-men," Lance-Corporals Brayshaw and Maule,<sup>41</sup> in the lead, ran into the enemy forty yards from the Australian post. Wharton's rifle-grenadiers, from close behind the bombers, threw a barrage on the spot. At a prearranged signal this barrage was lengthened two bays farther ahead, the bombers rushed two bays, and the grenadiers were brought up again. Over the head of the Australians three Stokes mortars of the 1st Light Trench Mortar Battery were shooting,<sup>42</sup> and the Australians were also supported by an excellently-sited Lewis gun. The rifle-grenades outranged the German egg-bombs, and, although German snipers only thirty or forty yards away fired whenever so much as a bomber's hand appeared, the

<sup>41</sup> L/Cpl. C. Maule (No. 1157; 2nd Bn.). Sailor; of Kensington, N.S.W.; b. Kaipara, N.Z., 1893. Killed in action, 4 May, 1917.

<sup>42</sup> They relieved at 3 p.m. those of the 5th Brigade.

combination of weapons was too much for the enemy. Cross-trench "G" was passed, and the Australian bombers drove the Württembergers steadily back. The loss was not heavy except among the leading bombers. Telfer was wounded, Brayshaw, Maule, and the bombing sergeant were killed. Relay after relay of throwers took up the fight, the teams being eventually commanded by a private, S. Marshall.<sup>43</sup> After rapidly advancing past cross-trench "F," Wharton barricaded the trench and posted sentries along the bays. The battalion's intelligence officer, Lieutenant Campbell, being sent up on a personal reconnaissance, after visiting O'Connell and Moy in the thick of their tussle in O.G.2,<sup>44</sup> found the advance in O.G.1 already ended except for intermittent bombing. The companies of the 4th Battalion, as in O.G.2, gradually relieved those of the 2nd Battalion at the fighting end of the trench. Before 6 o'clock the whole of the 4th was in the trenches, and by 7 the fighting had died down. The point reached was cross-trench "F," of which the Australians had won the southern, but not the northern, end.

Both the 2nd and 4th Battalions believed that they had advanced much farther than they did: consequently 5th Brigade Headquarters reported their position at cross-trench "D" (the eastern limit of the 5th Brigade's original objective, 800 yards from the Central Road), and the forward artillery officers so informed their batteries. Actually, they had won about 400 yards, reaching the same points as the 28th Battalion the day before; but this time the attack was made with ampler force and ammunition, and the trench gained was held. For the first time in the experience of the A.I.F. in France a really important objective had been secured by means of a bombing attack.<sup>45</sup>



<sup>43</sup> L/Cpl. S. Marshall, M.M. (No. 4351; 2nd Bn.). Bootmaker, of Waverley, N.S.W.; b Paddington, N.S.W., 14 Dec., 1895.

<sup>44</sup> He was received by them with shouts of: "Here, you keep out of this! This isn't your job!"

<sup>45</sup> At Quinn's, Lone Pine, and Hill 60 (Anzac), the bombing was almost entirely defensive; at Munster Alley, near Pozieres, bomb attacks succeeded temporarily, but were eventually beaten back by the Germans, who were at least the equals of any other troops in this form of warfare.

The positions thus newly gained on both flanks were to be strengthened during the night by special working parties of the 2nd Pioneers and 6th Brigade, which were also to dig communication trenches on either flank. From 4.30 p.m. onwards, however, observers had seen Germans rushing forward in lines or small parties from Riencourt to the sunken road confronting the Hindenburg Line, and at 7 o'clock the German barrage, which at intervals during the afternoon had blotted out with smoke and dust all view of the forward area, came down sharply, not only on the railway embankment and the ground immediately in front of it, but on all the captured portion of the Hindenburg Line. The whole garrison suffered; the trenches were very wide<sup>46</sup> and the troops therefore dug niches into their walls and parapets in order to escape the "side-" and "back-lash" of shells bursting near them. On the left flank a Stokes mortar of the 7th Brigade was smashed and all its crew, except the corporal, put out of action.

At 9 o'clock the bombardment, which had been descending since 7, lifted, and Germans attempted to rush the barricade in Ostrich Avenue, and were seen advancing on the front, but were driven off by bombs and machine-gun and rifle fire. At the right flank posts there was continual bombing which prevented the pioneers, who were brought up to fortify it, from doing more than digging a strong "T-head" in O.G.1.<sup>47</sup> Elsewhere east of the Central Road no sign of attack was reported by the infantry. On the other hand, artillery observers who had been directing fire upon the German reinforcements remarked at 7.10 and 9.18 what they thought to be the S.O.S. signal—green rockets or flares—and at once brought down the barrage in front of the Hindenburg Line. Green lights, however, continued to go up, and reports afterwards arrived from 5th Brigade Headquarters that, right of the road, no S.O.S. had been fired. The flares were almost

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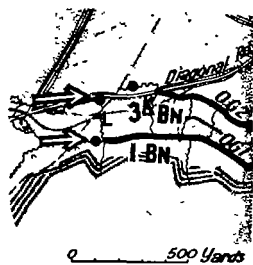
<sup>46</sup> They had probably been widened by the Germans cutting away the fire-step made by men of the 4th Australian Division in the rear wall of the trenches on April 11. Trenches, however, tended to be dug wider as the war progressed. The traverses also were much broader—3 feet in 1914, but as much as 30 feet in 1918.

<sup>47</sup> At the head of cross-trench "F" in O.G.2 a dugout was blazing, and the position was uncertain. Bombing prevented the building of a barricade in O.G.1, and, by order of the brigadier, the pioneers did not undertake it.



certainly fired by the German infantry either in fear of an attack or as a signal to their artillery that it was shooting upon its own men. Their effect was to engulf in the British barrage the troops that fired them.

From the left flank, however, news ultimately trickled through showing that the disturbance had not been without meaning. The posts of the 3rd Battalion, whose trench had been shelled spasmodically during the day—but sharply from 7 o'clock till 9—saw under the dust of the shell-fire German infantry moving in the Diagonal Road close ahead. When the S.O.S. signal was fired, it brought, at first, no response, the artillery being puzzled by similar enemy signals. But the posts opened fire and, shortly after 9, the Australian barrage descending obliterated with smoke and dust the signs of frontal attack: no more was seen of it except near the Central Road, where some Germans came to within bombing distance, but were driven off within half-an-hour by rifle and machine-gun fire. At the same time the enemy attacked the left, advancing up the Diagonal Road and bombing the flank post of the 3rd near the junction of cross-trench "L" and O.G.2. After half-an-hour's heavy bombing the Germans, who had some shelter in the road, approached the post very closely and threatened to encircle it. About 10 o'clock the New South Welshmen, running short of bombs, were driven out of it, with the loss of a Lewis gun, and retired, some down cross-trench "L" upon the 1st Battalion, others up the Diagonal Road to the old flank post at cross-trench "K."<sup>48</sup>



It was not until half-an-hour after midnight that news of this minor reverse reached brigade headquarters. The artillery, field and heavy, laid down at once a second heavy barrage, and at 3.50 a.m. a third, and several attempts were made by the infantry to reorganize and to recapture the post. But the 3rd Battalion—like the 6th Brigade before it and possibly the 15th Brigade that succeeded it—was suffering from the same exceedingly trying conditions that it had experienced nine months previously

<sup>48</sup> The men retiring up the road captured two German medical orderlies who had lost their way.

in front of Mouquet Farm: every time the supporting artillery laid down its barrage, the Australian posts on the left were in imminent danger from their own shells. So real was the risk that, even during moderate bombardments by the enemy, the troops sought shelter not under the front wall, but under the rear wall, of the trench.<sup>49</sup> It was frequently suggested that these shells came from Quéant, and the supposition was for a time accepted, until not only the direction of the bursts but the picking up of the shell-cases placed the origin of at least part of this fire beyond doubt.<sup>50</sup> The 3rd Battalion was at the end of its power for offence. New posts were established a little farther back, and the withdrawn flank was strengthened by the aid of the 6th Brigade's digging party.<sup>51</sup>

It is now known that the disturbances of this night were due to the effort of the Germans to deliver their fifth general counter-attack. The movements of German troops seen during the afternoon were due to reliefs which had become necessary on each flank owing to the exhaustion of the units holding them. On the right flank this was extreme. "At 7.30 p.m. (says the historian of the 124th I.R.) the commander of the 12th company (Lieutenant of Reserve Gundermann) was killed by a machine-gun bullet. Gradually the position became more acute, the troops, worn out by fighting, lost hour after hour more of their strength to resist; the artillery, too, which had fired through day and night, began to weary. The expenditure of material approached a record." On the western flank of the Australian "nest," the 123rd Grenadier Regiment, which had not yet been reinforced as had the 124th, was equally worn out. These facts decided General von Moser to support the 27th Division with three infantry battalions and three batteries of artillery, thus furnishing some immediate relief. Late in the evening (says the historian of the 123rd) "a nightmare was taken from the regiment" by the arrival of the II/Lehr (3rd Guard Division) in support, three companies going to Riencourt, and one advancing to the Artillery Protection Line.

The newly-arrived troops, however, were to play no passive rôle. "The English attacks," says the historian of the 27th Division, "carried out with ever-increasing stubbornness and in greater strength, made strong counter-measures necessary." It had been decided to

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<sup>49</sup> It is recorded by an officer of the 4th Battalion that, while his own battalion was waiting in Pioneer Trench on the afternoon of May 4, it watched the 3rd being thus shelled from behind. "Quite a bombardment," said this eyewitness, "really heavy."

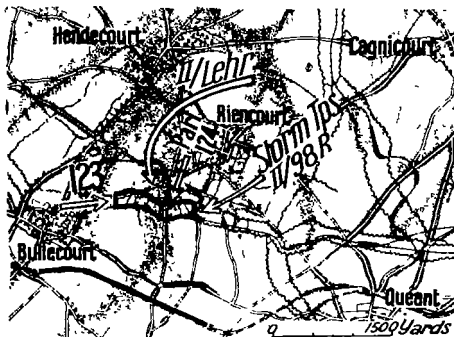
<sup>50</sup> It is possible that some of the shells did come from Quéant—the shelling of the 15th Brigade was afterwards attributed entirely to this cause; but some of the earlier fire was certainly British. Shells from some supporting battery, field or heavy, exploded not merely behind O.G.2, but behind O.G.1 and, in a few cases, behind the railway line.

<sup>51</sup> This party—4 officers and 120 men of the 21st Battalion under Captain A. G. Brown (Hawthorn, Vic.)—was in part drawn into the bombing. The work was much disturbed by fire, and Lieutenant S. J. Bennie (of Lauriston, Vic; killed in action on 5 Oct., 1918) was wounded. The prisoners on this flank were employed in carrying ammunition; the rules of war, if known, were not always remembered.

counter-attack at 9.30 p.m. with fresh troops and on a somewhat larger scale than had been previously attempted. The bombardments laid down by the German artillery in the afternoon were part of the preparation for this; its fire was to last for several hours, becoming denser between 9 and 9.30. On the eastern front the attack would be made by the II Battalion of the 98th R.I.R. (207th Division) which, with the III Battalion in support, had been brought up during the afternoon. On the western front it would be made by the II/Lehr Regiment. The 123rd Grenadier was to assist on the western flank, and the 124th I.R. to help by bombing down Ostrich Avenue.

According to the history of the 27th Division, the divisional storm-troops took part. The orders were to recapture "under all circumstances" the whole of the lost ground.

The fire of the Anzac artillery, however, seems to have had great effect. The newly-arrived troops found it difficult to get their bearings, and, while assembling, came under heavy bombardment. The II/Lehr advanced to the Diagonal Road, but got no farther. Only against the 3rd Australian Battalion's post on the left was anything effected, and the historian of the 123rd—though probably in error—implies that this was taken by the 123rd before the main attack in which, he says, "nothing was achieved except renewed heavy losses."



Meanwhile, on the Australian side, the two fresh battalions which had been promised to Gellibrand and Smith for relieving the troops in their respective sectors, had arrived.

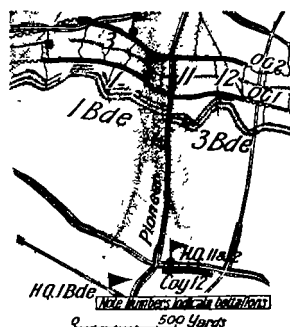
But during the morning of May 4th the plan had been changed, the divisional commander deciding that, as fighting would probably be heaviest on the right, he would bring in both the fresh battalions of the 3rd Brigade there, and concentrate the 1st Brigade behind the left sector at present held by two of its battalions, the 3rd and 1st. The strain of command having been heaviest on Gellibrand, the brigadier and staff of the 1st Brigade took over from him at noon on the 4th;<sup>52</sup> the commander and staff of the 3rd Brigade took

**The 3rd  
Brigade  
comes in**

<sup>52</sup> He and Major Plant, however, remained until that night to advise the 1st Brigade's staff.

over from Smith at midnight of May 4/5th,<sup>53</sup> when the 11th (Western Australia) and 12th (Tasmania, etc.) Battalions, escaping the bombardment which till then had been falling on the forward area, filed up Pioneer Trench and relieved the two battalions, 2nd and 4th, on which the heavy task of the day had fallen.<sup>54</sup> Both brigades, having suddenly been brought back from rest, were without their proper brigadiers, who were in England on leave before beginning the intended training of their troops. The 1st Brigade was temporarily commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Iven Mackay of the 4th Battalion, and the 3rd by Lieutenant-Colonel Mullen of the 9th Battalion.

The first hours of May 5th therefore found a new brigade, the 3rd, holding with two fresh battalions the right sector, and the 1st Brigade holding with two rather tired ones the left. The captured position was now over 1,100 yards in width, but only one avenue of communication, Pioneer Trench, was yet available to it, and the nearest supports were still, as on April 11th, at the railway and the neighbouring sunken road. A party of the much tried 6th Brigade (which had now been formed into a single battalion under Major Wiltshire, and bivouacked farther back in support, in the Noreuil-Longatte road) had, with the 2nd Pioneers, worked during the night on a new support and communication trench east of the Central Road,<sup>55</sup> but this was not yet ready for use. On the left rear Bullecourt was still in German hands. Airmen and observers on the ground having reported that the place appeared to be deserted during the hours of daylight, the 7th Division had decided to attempt its capture during the day by patrols. The appearance, however, was only due to the



<sup>53</sup> Brigadier-General Smith remained with the staff of the 3rd Brigade until the following night.

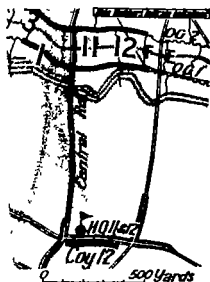
<sup>54</sup> The trench-mortars of the 3rd Brigade came in shortly afterwards, relieving those of the 1st Brigade, which in turn relieved those of the 6th Brigade west of the Central Road. The 3rd Machine Gun Company, however, was delayed in relieving the 1st and 5th Companies, through the loss of its commander, Major G Tostevin (Hobart, Tas.), who was killed while reconnoitring to find the positions and the routes by which to lead in his company.

<sup>55</sup> The 22nd Battalion supplied the 6th Brigade's party.

retention of the German garrisons below ground; and when patrols of the 8th Devon<sup>56</sup> approached during May 5th they were heavily fired on and forced to abandon the attempt. Major-General Shoubridge<sup>57</sup> of the 7th Division then decided to attack the place with another brigade after full artillery preparation. He anticipated that the arrangements would take three days, but, on the insistence of the V Corps commander, decided to make the attempt on May 7th. Till then, therefore, the 2nd Australian Division must hold its sector without support.<sup>58</sup>

The little battlefield of Bullecourt, with its two ruined villages in the background, the Hindenburg parapets drawn across the open country below them, the stumps of Bullecourt on the left, the railway bank across the middle distance, and stretcher-bearers and other wayfarers trailing like ants day and night up and down the centre of the field, was a focussing point for more eyes than those that constantly watched it from any high ground in rear. The British effort in the offensive having died down at most other points, Bullecourt was occupying in the *communiqués* a prominence out of all proportion to its geographical extent. The whole world was now daily following the bare outlines of the struggle there.

The more exposed—that is, the eastern—half of the sector seized by the Australians was now held by the 3rd Brigade, disposed as shown in the marginal sketch, the 12th Battalion being posted on the right in both trenches, and the 11th on the left. Headquarters of both battalions, together with the reserve company of the 12th, were in the sunken road in front of the railway. In O.G.2 the right flank at cross-trench "F" had no sooner been taken over by the 12th Battalion than the enemy again attacked it, doubtless endeavouring to gain the



<sup>56</sup> Belonging to the 20th Brigade, but lent to the 22nd, all of whose own battalions had now been used up.

<sup>57</sup> Major-Gen. T. H. Shoubridge, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., p.s.c. Officer of British Regular Army; commanded 54th Inf. Bde., 1915/17, 7th Div., 1917/19; b. 15 June, 1871. Died 27 Oct., 1923.

<sup>58</sup> Its commander, however, indicated that it was fully prepared to wait until May 8 for the 7th Division's attack.

northern end of "F," a cross-trench by then so blown about that it was in parts hardly recognisable. In a fierce bomb-fight, which lasted for half-an-hour, the enemy succeeded in reaching, but not passing, the Australian barricade; Lieutenant Youl,<sup>59</sup> in charge of it, was killed, but the Germans were driven off. The 12th Battalion now began a struggle, which lasted throughout the morning, to push eastwards along the trenches and reach the crest of the spur, which had from the first been the objective in this sector. In O.G.1, Lieutenant Heurtley<sup>60</sup> of Captain Newland's company led the attack and, after a very keen fight in which he was wounded and his right-hand man, Lance-Corporal Marriner,<sup>61</sup> killed, the Tasmanians had by 9 o'clock passed the Noreuil-Riencourt road and the entrance of cross-trench "E" (which at this time was even more completely destroyed than "F"), and even reached cross-trench "D."<sup>62</sup> A block was made beyond "E," but shortly afterwards the shells of the supporting heavy artillery falling about this position caused the flank to be withdrawn to the old barricade. In O.G.2 it remained near cross-trench "F."

It was intended that the 3rd Brigade should carry on the work begun on the previous day by the 2nd and 4th Battalions, the 12th Battalion first thrusting along the trenches eastwards and, when it came to a stop, the 11th changing places with it at the fighting front on the right and securing, if possible, the crest of the spur. These plans were embodied in orders, both verbal and written, from divisional to brigade headquarters, and from brigade to the two battalions, but the course of events gradually rendered them entirely impracticable. The early hours of May 5th were disturbed with the sharp fighting over the lost post of the 3rd Battalion

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<sup>59</sup> Lieut. J. B. O. Youl, 12th Bn. Engineer; of Perth, Tas.; b. Perth, 1894. Killed in action, 5 May, 1917.

<sup>60</sup> Heurtley, whose surname was really Reed, had at the beginning of the war been serving in the Royal Australian Navy, but, on hearing that there was little prospect of service at the active front, had deserted and entered the A.I.F. as Eric Heurtley. He was pardoned by the King, and, after this fight, resumed his true name (Lieut. P. F. H. Reed, M.C.; 12th Bn. Of Perth, W. Aust., and Wellington, N.Z., b. Westport, N.Z., 11 Nov, 1887. Killed in action, 24 April, 1918.)

<sup>61</sup> L/Cpl. L. W. Marriner (No. 30; 12th Bn.). Tailor; of Launceston, Tas.; b. Launceston, 1891. Killed in action, 5 May, 1917.

<sup>62</sup> This, the farthest point reached in Second Bullecourt, was about the middle of the sector captured by the 4th Brigade in First Bullecourt.

on the left, and the bombardments and counter-bombardments which it aroused. These had barely quietened down when observers in rear saw green flares rising along the front. The artillery of both sides—each taking the flares for those of its own infantry—came down heavily, blotting out the forward area in dust and smoke.<sup>63</sup> On ascertaining that the flares had not been fired by their infantry, the Australian guns presently ceased, and the disturbance gradually died away. At 7.55 the same thing again occurred. It was clear that for some reason the Germans had been firing similar flares to those used by the British, and the result was so confusing that Colonel Mullen of the 3rd Brigade was ordered to make more use of other methods of signalling.

At 8.30 a.m. a heavy German barrage again descended on the Hindenburg Line and on the railway and neighbouring sunken road. It lasted only ten minutes, and there followed several peaceful hours in which higher authorities endeavoured to prepare for the intended attack eastwards. The successive bombardments, however, had done great damage both in the trenches and in the sunken road in which lay the supports. The whole effort of the 3rd Brigade's forward troops was for the present directed to excavating and repairing their broken-down trenches. Meanwhile, in the 1st Brigade's sector, the left flank of the 1st Battalion in O.G.1 received three successive local counter-attacks made by Germans from Bullecourt. The trenches occupied by both sides had been largely destroyed by shell-fire, and the German bombing party could be plainly seen gathering in O.G.1 east of the village, whence it each time moved along the trench to make the attack. The first attempt was made by about 40 men at 10.30 a.m. They were stopped by rifle-grenades from reaching the Australian barricade, and after two attempts withdrew to Bullecourt. At 1 o'clock they came on again, but were beaten back in five minutes. At 4 o'clock they made a much more determined effort, and, in spite of well-directed shells from a Stokes mortar, which fired on their point of assembly, and from the rifle-grenadiers, thrice forced their way within

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<sup>63</sup> A carrying party of the 10th Battalion, moving from Igr1 Corner to the railway, was caught in this barrage, and lost seven men. Lieutenant W. T. Dent-Young (Tambellup, W. Aust.) of the 11th was killed in the same barrage.

bombing distance. But they could not reach the barricade, and after three-quarters of an hour of sharp fighting,<sup>64</sup> were driven off.<sup>65</sup>

In the 3rd Brigade sector no such attack occurred, but towards noon the German artillery laid its fire heavily on the whole area, some of the troops in the sunken roads suffering more loss than those in the line.<sup>66</sup> The shelling remained severe during the afternoon, and after dark intensified into such a bombardment as Australian troops had not experienced since those of Pozières. It was indeed ever afterwards a matter of discussion in the A.I.F. whether, during certain short periods, of which this was one,<sup>67</sup> the shell-fire was not heavier at Bullecourt than at Pozières. The trenches were much wider than on the Somme, but even so the shell-bursts, frequently shovelling in their banks, buried men whom their comrades then set themselves to dig out in frantic haste. Sergeant Veitch<sup>68</sup> of the 11th, in charge of the post in Ostrich Avenue, was thus buried more than once.<sup>69</sup> The enemy's aeroplanes had been overhead, and during the afternoon his infantry had been seen dribbling forward by

**May 5-6—the  
sixth general  
counter-attack**

<sup>64</sup> The 1st Battalion bombers being hard pressed in this attack, Lance-Corporal Cullen scrambled on to the parapet with his Lewis gun and fired with it from his hip into the thick of the enemy. He was shot down and killed. (L/Cpl. A. M. Cullen, 3727, 1st Bn. Iron structural worker, of Hurstville, N.S.W.; b. Glasgow, Scotland, 1889.)

<sup>65</sup> Shortly after the first of these counter-attacks, Major Woodforde, acting in command of the 1st Battalion, was inspecting his trenches when he was mortally wounded by shell-fire. Captain A. K. Mackenzie was at once sent up to command. After the third counter-attack, the 1st Battalion reinforced its left flank, and at night put out two new posts.

<sup>66</sup> The 4th Battalion, which had been withdrawn to the railway in support of the 1st and 3rd, lost 80 men killed or wounded during this day. The support company of the 12th Battalion, in the sunken road in front of the railway, lost a third of its men and almost all its officers. In the 10th Battalion Captain W. S. de Courcy-Ireland, Lieutenant A. T. Hill, and a number of men were hit. The bombardment caught the 3rd Machine Gun Company in a road south of the railway on its way to relieve the 5th Brigade's machine-gunners in the line. Lieutenant E. W. Harris was killed and Lieutenant G. E. Jamieson wounded. (De Courcy-Ireland belonged to Millicent, S. Aust.; Hill to Broken Hill, N.S.W.; Harris to Claremont, W. Aust.; and Jamieson to Gympie, Q'land.)

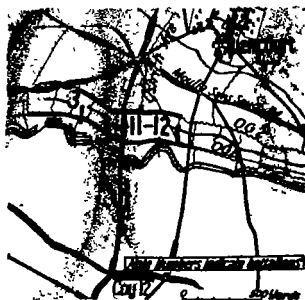
<sup>67</sup> Other such instances occurred on May 12 and 14-15.

<sup>68</sup> Sgt. C. J. Veitch, D.C.M. (No. 975, 11th Bn.) Railway navvy; of Claremont, W. Aust.; b. Buln Buln, Vic., 13 Aug., 1884.

<sup>69</sup> The intensity of the shell-fire may be judged from a report upon the action of Corporal H. A. Black (Forbes, N.S.W., and Kalgoorlie, W. Aust.), who dug out the men in the bay to the right of his own and rescued three alive. He was shortly afterwards himself buried, but was dug out by one of his men. He next dug out the men in the next bay to the left, again finding three alive. Meanwhile, a shell had buried his own men, but he dug out four of them alive. (He was killed in action on 31 Oct., 1917.)



twos and threes into the sunken roads close in front of the line, and on the right had, since dusk, been endeavouring to dig some sort of shelter there. Officers and men in the forward area were certain that these signs would be followed by a counter-attack, and were not surprised to hear, at 10 o'clock, the sound of bombing in Ostrich Avenue and near the Central Road, where the S.O.S. signal was at once sent up by the right of the 3rd Battalion. For some reason flares of several colours, including similar green signals, were now sent up in sheaves by the Germans in the Moulin Sans Souci road, close in front of the 3rd Brigade. The Australian artillery, as before, mistaking these for the S.O.S. of its infantry, laid down an extremely heavy barrage<sup>70</sup> which completely smothered any hostile movement.



At this juncture Major Darnell of the 11th, senior officer in the right sector, received from his battalion commander, Colonel Rafferty, a renewed order that the companies of the 11th must carry on the attack originally planned, changing places with the 12th on the right, and bombing eastwards down both trenches. The artillery would lay a barrage north and east of the position to cover the attack. But after the bombardments which had fallen on them, and which were still continuing, the troops were in no condition for such an enterprise. The two battalions together could not muster there more than 200 unwounded men. Vowles's company of the 12th, which had suffered heavy bombardment in support,<sup>71</sup> had been reorganized in two platoons and sent forward to reinforce the garrison. On the right flank even the precise location of the troops was uncertain. Three times during the night the companies of the 12th in O.G.2 tried without success to gain touch with Captain Newland's company in the shattered cross-trench "F" and O.G.1.

<sup>70</sup> On the 3rd Battalion's front the barrage came down within thirty seconds of its being asked for. The shooting was most effective against the enemy, but in both brigade sectors a number of shells burst short.

<sup>71</sup> In the sunken road in front of the railway.

Major Darnell accordingly called a conference of the officers of the 11th and 12th, and all present agreed that the enemy was still preparing to attack, and that any attempt on their own part to attack would merely present their men, in their strained condition, as easy victims to the impending enemy counter-stroke. Darnell accordingly decided that the garrison should stay where it was, and, although Colonel Rafferty, employing the only means of communication that still held out—the “high-power buzzer”—insisted that the troops must attack, Darnell took the responsibility of holding them where they were.

At 1 a.m. on May 6th the enemy's heavy artillery again descended on the front line, Pioneer Trench, and railway. The right flank posts of the 12th escaped in consequence of their proximity to the enemy, but the remainder of the 12th, and the 11th farther to the left, suffered severe casualties. Posts were shattered and men buried.<sup>72</sup> More than once during the next four hours German infantry were seen moving in front of the right sector, and at 3.30 some demonstration by them<sup>73</sup> caused the S.O.S. signal to be fired, bringing down a barrage from the Australian guns. The German bombardment continued steadily until 4.30, just after day-break, when it was intensified. The attack was obviously imminent, when a welcome reinforcement of the 10th Battalion—a company under Lieutenant Partridge—came up, though with considerable loss, through Pioneer Trench, and was parcelled out among both battalions of the garrison.

At 5 o'clock, a quarter of an hour before sunrise, the bombardment lifted from the front lines, and the German infantry attempted to advance from the Moulin Sans Souci road and down Ostrich Avenue. At that moment there fell the barrage intended to cover the Australian attack which Darnell had refused to undertake.<sup>74</sup> It smothered the German frontal attack, on which were also turned the rifles, Lewis

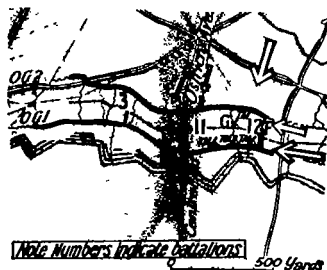
<sup>72</sup> During this bombardment Lieutenant W. W. Graham of the 11th found a Lewis gun crew shattered, and its gun buried. He dug out the gun and calmly trained another crew. Captain A. H. Appleby (Hobart, Tas.) of the 12th was killed at this time near Ostrich Avenue.

<sup>73</sup> Various interpreted as a “raid,” “demonstration,” and “attack.” It occurred on the front of O G 2 and the right bomb-stop in O G 1. At this bomb-stop grenades were thrown but, on a Stokes mortar opening, movement ceased.

<sup>74</sup> The 2nd and 4th Batteries (18-pounders) and the 101st and 102nd (4.5-inch howitzers) carried out this special bombardment. At the same time “Q” Group laid down a diverting bombardment on the left.

guns, and machine-guns of the 3rd Battalion's sector on the left.<sup>75</sup> Sergeant Veitch's post again beat off the Germans in Ostrich Avenue, and, although a few managed to approach O.G.2 near the Central Road, the attack here failed.

A simultaneous attempt up both Hindenburg trenches on the right, however, proved far more dangerous. In O.G.2 the Germans seized the bomb-stop and forced their way forty yards along the trench. The right of the 12th under Company Sergeant-Major Fletcher<sup>76</sup> counter-attacked, but as it did so it saw the enemy 200 yards to its right rear advancing along O.G.1 behind the dense fumes of an active *flammenwerfer*. The situation in that trench was evidently critical and part of the garrison of O.G.2 therefore manned the back of their trench and tried with their rifles and Lewis guns to assist the defence of O.G.1.



The defence of the flank, but particularly of O.G.1, depended largely on the trench-mortars, the duty of whose crews was to try and keep the enemy bombers at a distance. Four mortars were in position, one in a "slit" off O.G.1 not 100 yards behind the bomb-stop; two in cross-trench "G," 150 yards farther back; and one in reserve in O.G.1 not far behind them. They were in charge of resolute N.C.O's and under command of a very determined officer, Lieutenant MacNeil,<sup>77</sup> a Scottish ship-repairer who, when the war broke out, happened to be at Largs Bay (South Australia) working for experience. One of them had fired earlier in the night, apparently with success, on some assembly of the enemy in O.G.1.

Now, on the sound of bombing, the three mortars on guard had opened at once, the easternmost gun firing along O.G.1 and those in "G" barraging No-Man's Land farther north.

<sup>75</sup> The left of the 3rd being on a rise commanded a good view. One machine-gun there obtained good targets, and was reported to have accounted for 50 Germans.

<sup>76</sup> Lieut. R. W. Fletcher, M.C., 12th Bn. Civil servant; of Moonah, Tas. b. Glenorchy, Tas., 8 Dec., 1891.

<sup>77</sup> Lieut. A. W. L. MacNeil, D.S.O.; 3rd L.T.M. Bty. Engineer, of Scotland; b. Munlochy, Ross-shire, 27 Aug., 1892.

But Germans who had managed to pass or evade the barrage in O.G.2 came presently down cross-trench "F," bombing from the north. The Australians of the flank bomb-post in O.G.1 turned their attention to this attack, and were then suddenly caught in the flank by other Germans advancing with two *flammenwerfer* along O.G.1.<sup>78</sup> It was still dark. The lurid flare, dense smoke, and loud roar of the flame-throwers produced a formidable effect, and, the trench having been previously battered into a mere shallow depression, these instruments were more than usually dangerous. At the same time the men working them were more than usually exposed.<sup>79</sup> The Australian bombers broke back, and the Germans came on, covering their advance by sending machine-gunners and bombers out into the craters on either side of the trench.

As the Germans were now too close for the foremost Stokes mortar to get at them, its commander, Corporal North,<sup>80</sup> and some of its crew held back the enemy, throwing Stokes mortar shells as well as bombs, while the rest, with the Germans only a few yards away, carried the gun clear. MacNeil now turned his reserve mortar upon the Germans in O.G.1 and in the craters, while the two mortars in "G" shortened their range. The Germans, however, still advanced, one flame-thrower leading, the bombers coming next, and then the second flame-thrower. The enemy soon came too close for the mortars in "G" to fire on him, and, advancing across the open and in the trench, threatened to reach them. MacNeil accordingly ordered Corporal Hockey<sup>81</sup> to withdraw them, and, fighting alone for a time, held back the enemy from the trench-junction. He was standing in a crevice off O.G.1 when the leading flame-thrower came round the bend full into sight. With the flame roaring past, MacNeil flung a bomb at the bearer and killed him. The second flame-thrower was still active,<sup>82</sup> but at this critical moment MacNeil was joined by

<sup>78</sup> Captain Newland, 12th Battalion, had caused an obstacle of "concertina" wire to be placed in this trench beyond the Australian barricade, but the Germans had dragged it away with grappling irons.

<sup>79</sup> Usually the flame from this apparatus could not be projected into the bottom of a trench bay unless the carrier recklessly exposed himself.

<sup>80</sup> Sgt. J. North, D.C.M. (No. 931; 3rd L.T.M. Bty.). Painter; of Bunbury, W. Aust.; b. Bunbury, 1890.

<sup>81</sup> Sgt. E. V. Hockey, D.C.M., M.M. (No. 778; 3rd L.T.M. Bty.). Miner, of Broken Hill, N.S.W.; b. Dunolly, Vic., 9 July, 1893. Died 8 Feb., 1921.

<sup>82</sup> Ahead were bursting the German egg-bombs, then came the smoke of the *flammenwerfer*, and close to it the bursts of the stick-bombs.

Captain Newland of the 12th, whose company had held the flank sector. With a box of bombs, they held up the second *flammenwerfer*, while the two mortars got clear, withdrawing down O.G.I to come into action again from the Central Road.

But the position of the small party holding the Germans in O.G.I was much exposed. Newland was soon hit in the arm and chest.<sup>83</sup> MacNeil was at that time bombing from a shell-hole outside the trench, and the men in the trench gave way. Panic had seized most of the garrison and, although the second flame-thrower also had now been destroyed, O.G.I quickly emptied as far as the Central Road.<sup>84</sup>

The 1st Battalion, holding the same trench to the left of that road, was not at first involved. About 6 o'clock, however, the corporal, by name Howell,<sup>85</sup> commanding its post nearest to the road, sent to his battalion commander, Captain Mackenzie,<sup>86</sup> the message: "Battalion on right is retiring." Mackenzie ordered his signalling officer to take all signallers, batmen, and other hands at headquarters and drive the enemy back. Egg- and stick-bombs were falling around the entrance of O.G.I,<sup>87</sup> but these troops, with others, lined the road-bank and threw bombs in return. The Germans seemed to be about 80 strong, and were led by two officers. Both of these were soon killed, and two machine-guns in cross-trench "G" and another on the Central Road 200 yards south of the Hindenburg Line forced the Germans in O.G.I to keep their heads down.

At this juncture those who were watching from both trenches west of the road saw one Australian break out from the rest, scramble to the open beside O.G.I, and run along it pelting bombs down at the enemy, who fled back. He was presently observed to fall into the trench, wounded. It

<sup>83</sup> To avoid alarming his men, he slipped quietly from the trench into a neighbouring sap, and thence, despite much loss of blood, made his way over the open to the Central Road.

<sup>84</sup> The attacking Germans passed within a few yards of MacNeil and cut off his line of retreat down O.G.I, but he, like Newland, got back across the open. On the way he became tangled in the old wire south of O.G.I.

<sup>85</sup> Cpl. G. J. Howell, V.C., M.M. (No. 2445; 1st Bn.). Builder, of Enfield, N.S.W.; b. Enfield, 23 Nov., 1893.

<sup>86</sup> Lieut.-Col. A. K. Mackenzie, D.S.O., M.C. Commanded 1st Bn, 1918/19. Grazier; of Bondi and Penrith, N.S.W.; b. Bondi, N.S.W., 3 Jan., 1888. Died 20 Nov., 1925.

<sup>87</sup> The Germans are said to have also used some sort of incendiary bomb in this fight.

was Howell, the corporal from the 1st Battalion's flank post.<sup>88</sup> The incident was followed by three-quarters of an hour's heavy fighting by men of both brigades. Captain Mackenzie, who at the beginning had directed the counter-thrust, himself throwing bombs from just inside the mouth of O.G.1, observed that in front of his own brigade's sector also there were Germans concentrated along the Diagonal Road and farther to the left, apparently waiting for a chance to attack. He, therefore, would not commit his own men too far from their proper sector.

But soon after the disappearance of the flame-throwers the shaken men of the 11th and 12th rallied. Captains Hallahan, Hemingway, and Burgess<sup>89</sup> of the 11th, and Lieutenant Lehmann<sup>90</sup> of the 3rd Machine Gun Company, were wounded in this fighting, and Lieutenants Dougall and Wendt of the 10th and Daniel<sup>91</sup> of the 11th killed. Company Sergeant-Major Fowles<sup>92</sup> of the 11th led the attack along the trench in O.G.1, men of the 3rd Machine Gun Company and 3rd Light Trench Mortar Battery fighting among the infantry, bombing or working Lewis guns.<sup>93</sup> Lieutenant MacNeil of the Stokes mortars ran forward in the open beside the trench, pelting the Germans with bombs, and then picking up an abandoned Lewis gun he shot at them until the gun was damaged by an enemy bullet. Major Darnell also launched a bombing attack<sup>94</sup> from O.G.2 down cross-trench "F" against their flank.

But the Germans were then already in flight. Some were cut off and killed; the rest, chased by bursts of machine-gun fire, withdrew hastily behind their former barricades on the right. The 11th and 12th, much weakened, reoccupied their old sector. In O.G.1 MacNeil and others rebuilt their barricade farther east than before. In O.G.2 also the

<sup>88</sup> For this action Howell was awarded the Victoria Cross. Lieutenant Richards supported him with a Lewis gun, following along the trench and firing bursts.

<sup>89</sup> Capt. A. G. Burgess, 11th Bn. Surveyor's assistant; of Maylands, W. Aust.; b. York, W. Aust., 26 Aug., 1897.

<sup>90</sup> Lieut. B. C. Lehmann, M.C.; 3rd M.G. Coy. Marine engineer; of Fremantle, W. Aust.; b. Matland, S. Aust., 6 Dec., 1879. Killed in action, 21 Sept., 1917.

<sup>91</sup> Lieut. V. B. Daniel, 11th Bn. Bank official; of Maffra, Vic., and Beverley, W. Aust.; b. Narracan, Vic., 9 July, 1889. Killed in action, 6 May, 1917.

<sup>92</sup> Warrant Officer H. J. Fowles, D.C.M., M.M. (No. 1855, 11th Bn.) Lighthouse keeper; of Albany and Cape Naturaliste, W. Aust.; b. Albany, 1 April, 1889.

<sup>93</sup> One machine-gun in O.G.1 had been hit by a shell and another damaged by a bomb. Lieutenant R. F. Warren (Payneham and Paradise, S. Aust.) ordered the damaged gun to be fired from its auxiliary tripod, while he himself joined the infantry in the bomb-fight. Sergeant M. Harty (Cairns, Q'land) continued to work his gun, though his left arm was broken.

<sup>94</sup> Under Sergeant H. J. Adams (Cookernup, W. Aust.), 11th Battalion.

Germans were being pursued by the 12th beyond their former front, but Company Sergeant-Major Fletcher (12th), seeing the enemy leaving the trench and breaking back towards the Noreuil-Riencourt road (near cross-trench "E") as if to get behind him, had stopped the pursuit.

As often happened, news of this crisis did not reach even the nearest headquarters in rear of the line until it was over. At 6.33 Colonel Iven Mackay (1st Brigade) at the railway learnt from Colonel Rafferty at the sunken road that the Germans had broken through to the Central Road.<sup>95</sup> At the same time the several groups of artillery were informed, and from about 6.30 until 7.30 the whole supporting artillery of the corps was in play. Meanwhile for miles back the infantry reserves were set in motion. First of them, a company and a half of the 4th Battalion under Major Lloyd hurried from the railway to safeguard the flank of the 1st Brigade,<sup>96</sup> as Pioneer Trench was crowded, they went in artillery formation across the open and reached the position in ten minutes. Lloyd, however, was then informed by Colonel Moore of the 3rd that his trench, left of the road, had not been attacked, and was already sufficiently manned. Had the Germans attacked there, as on the right, the situation would have been dangerous indeed, for the 3rd had for over two days been under very severe strain, and could hardly have repelled a serious onslaught. As things were, Lloyd was able to move his troops into O.G.2 on the right of the road, thus allowing the 11th and 12th to strengthen their posts. Shortly afterwards, on arrival of the main part of the 10th (Major Steele), the 4th was withdrawn to the railway. The Australian barrage falling about the German concentration on the left suppressed any movement there except in O.G.1, where, at 8.30, a small bombing attack came against the flank of the 1st Battalion and was driven off. Shortly after noon parties of the enemy were again seen carrying bombs to a point in

<sup>95</sup> This information appears to have come from the signallers of the 11th and 12th Battalions, who were in a dugout in O.G.1 near cross-trench "F." The Germans overran this dugout and threw a few bombs down the entrance, killing and wounding several men, but did not attempt to clear the chamber. The signallers had with them their "high-power buzzer," and appear to have sent the news by this means. Later, when the trench was retaken, they were rescued.

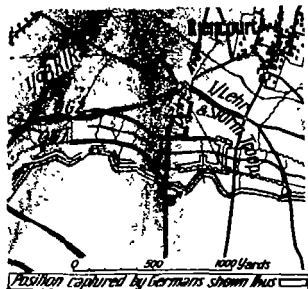
<sup>96</sup> The whole of the 4th was ordered to advance, and the 2nd Battalion was ordered to the railway, but on the arrival a few minutes later of better news Colonel Mackay stopped all troops that had not yet left the railway. Of the 3rd Brigade, the 10th and 9th Battalions were ordered up, as was a company of the 6th Brigade which still lay in support.

O.G.I., 100 yards from the 1st Battalion's barricade. The Australian rifle-grenadiers forthwith bombarded the place; a dump of German bombs blew up, and here also all movement ceased.

Like the preceding counter attack (on May 4/5), the German thrust at dawn on May 6 had been undertaken by troops from other divisions placed temporarily under the control of General von Maur and the staff of the 27th Division.

It had already become obvious that the 27th Division must be relieved. At 9.40 a.m. on May 5 its front-line troops received orders that they were to cease counter-attacking, barricade their flanks, and hold on; the 3rd Guard Division would be brought out of the line at Inchy (opposite the centre of the I Anzac Corps) to relieve them. As an immediate measure, the 1/98th R.I.R. (207th Division) was put in to take over from the exhausted 123rd, but would itself be relieved as soon as possible by the 9th Grenadier Regiment (3rd Guard Division). The mixed force now holding the eastern sector—124th I.R. and parts of the 120th I.R., 98th R.I.R., and 15th R.I.R.—was to be replaced at once by the I Battalion, Lehr Regiment. The movements that were observed by the Australians during the night of May 5 and interpreted as "raids" or attempts to "attack," were almost certainly the endeavours of these newly-arrived troops to reach and occupy their allotted positions. In order to deny the Australians more time to consolidate, the next counter-attack—the sixth general attempt—was to be made forthwith, at dawn. For this purpose the army commander sent up specially trained storm-troops with *flammenwerfer*.<sup>97</sup> The 1/98th R.I.R. on the Australian left was not itself to attack, but was to fire on the Australians as they were driven southwards by the storm-troops.

The history of the 27th Infantry Division states that "in spite of the keen and determined attempt of these troops specially schooled for such objects,"<sup>98</sup> they could no longer achieve the same success as on May 4. Actually, however, they achieved more, the storm-troops on the eastern flank on May 4 having attacked up empty trenches. After the present failure, the commander of the storm-troops personally explained the position to higher commanders, and his report convinced them that "there remained only to carry out a deliberate attack . . . based on the most thoroughly collated information, and the most careful registration and strongest possible preparation by the artillery."<sup>99</sup> The carrying out of this had to be handed over to the 3rd Guard Division



<sup>97</sup> These were apparently to be used on the western as well as the eastern flank. It is recorded that the 3rd Australian Battalion during its tour sighted a party with a *flammenwerfer* in the Diagonal Road, and that the carrier of the *flammenwerfer* was shot by a sniper. It is possible that this was the occasion.

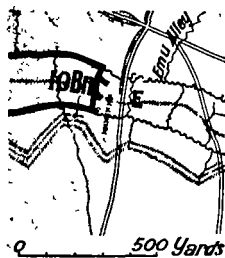
<sup>98</sup> A prisoner stated that in the I/Lehr each company was headed by an N.C.O. and eight men, acting as assault-troops. After them came six pioneers with the *flammenwerfer*.

<sup>99</sup> History of the 27th Infantry Division, p. 60.



Thus ended the enemy's sixth, and most dangerous, general counter-attack. The 10th Australian Battalion, which at 7 o'clock had been brought up to the railway across the open, now took over the right, and was ordered to secure any part of the trenches that had been lost. It was wrongly supposed that the flank in O.G.2 had previously lain beyond the Noreuil-Riencourt road, and at 5.40 a small thrust was accordingly made here, ten Germans being captured in a dugout. The evidence of aeroplane photographs renders it doubtful whether the road was reached, but at some stage of the operations a barricade was erected seventy-five yards beyond cross-trench "F" and, at some later stage, abandoned, and another built fifty yards farther back.

The brigade and divisional commanders now recognised the extreme difficulty of thrusting the right flank further eastward.<sup>100</sup> Orders were therefore issued for the right flank in the Hindenburg Line to be finally barricaded off that night at its present position. Several bays beyond the barricades were to be filled in, and wire-entanglement laid there between the Australian barricades and the enemy's. The work was begun after dark by a working party of engineers under Lieutenant Scarr<sup>101</sup> and some pioneers, with covering parties of the 10th lying out beyond them. The carrying out of this delicate task was favoured by the unusual tranquillity of the night, both sides being worn out by the previous heavy fighting. Besides the work of the special parties, men of the 10th cut several T-head saps in advance of cross-trench "F." The engineers filled in two bays of O.G.1 behind the foremost barricade, and erected a thin apron of wire there. The pioneers dug the forward section of the new communication trench on this flank. But the night's work ended before any alterations had been made in O.G.2. Unfortunately, as the parties withdrew,



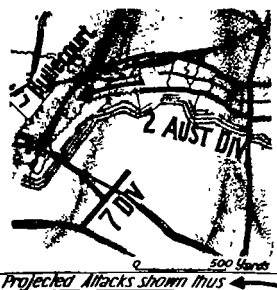
<sup>100</sup> The argument urged against this by the 3rd Brigade—that as soon as the flank reached the crest it was shot out by the enemy—was altogether erroneous, since the flank had never come near the crest. The main obstacles were the proximity of a good communication trench from Riencourt, and local difficulties caused by the presence of German cross-saps and of the Noreuil-Riencourt road.

<sup>101</sup> Lieut. F. S. Scarr, 5th Field Coy. Engrs. Ironmonger, of New Norfolk, Tas; b Camberwell, London, 17 Aug., 1879. Killed in action, 6 May, 1917.

Lieutenant Scarr and several others were killed, and the work was incorrectly reported as being complete in both trenches.

Activity was now transferred to the left flank, where the 7th Division was on May 7th to attack Bullecourt. The orders for this attack, issued on May 5th, provided for several preliminary feint bombardments to be laid down by the artillery of the V and I Anzac Corps during the two days preceding the operation. By instructions from General Gough, the attack was to be delivered at 3.45 a.m. from a new direction, the south-east, and with strictly limited objectives, first the front trench, and, second, the south-eastern quarter of the village. The attack had one object only, to safeguard the left flank of the 2nd Australian Division, and General Shoubridge (7th Division) had asked that the Australians should assist by securing beforehand the two Hindenburg trenches up to the north-eastern corner of Bullecourt, where the 7th Division would later join them. General Smyth undertook that this should be done, if possible, and, as the 3rd Battalion, holding the left in O.G.2 was completely exhausted and the 1st Brigade had no fresh troops with whom to relieve it, he allotted to it the last battalion of the 3rd Brigade, the 9th (Queensland), which had been working in the 11th Division's back area. By reason of this transfer, Gellibrand's 6th Brigade, still lying in close reserve, had temporarily to act as support for the 3rd Brigade.<sup>102</sup> The 9th Battalion, then in Noreuil, was warned at 4 p.m. on May 6th that it would attack at 9.30 that night. Obviously, however, the arrangements must be extremely hurried, and therefore at 6.40 p.m. the two divisional commanders in conference decided that the Australian attack should take place at the same time as the British.

**The capture  
of Bullecourt**



<sup>102</sup> Gellibrand, however, obtained leave for it to remain, until actually required, in the Noreuil-Longatte road.

During the afternoon of May 6th the tired 1st and 3rd Battalions were hurriedly relieved in O.G.1 and 2 by the 4th and 2nd respectively, the men being mostly dribbled along Pioneer Trench with few casualties,<sup>103</sup> in spite of constant shelling. At dusk the 9th followed, and made its way to the extreme left of the position, three companies stationing themselves in O.G.1, where the chief attack would be made, and one in O.G.2. Major Wilder-Neligan was in charge, an impetuous, dare-devil officer, but free from the carelessness with which those qualities are often associated. Here, as in his raid at Fleurbaix,<sup>104</sup> his preparations were made with punctilious completeness. At 10.30 p.m. his men began making dumps of wire, stakes, bombs, and other necessities near the barricade in O.G.1. Telephone lines were laid to the same point, and relays of runners arranged for. At 11.30 company commanders, and officers of the machine-guns and light and medium trench-mortars, received their final instructions in Neligan's dugout. At 2 o'clock the Germans attacked and drove back the left flank post in O.G.1, held by the 4th Battalion, the flank guard falling back to the earlier position near cross-trench "K."

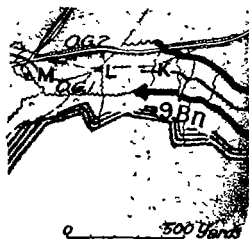
At 3.45, on the left, the 20th Brigade of the 7th Division attacked, employing the 2nd Gordon Highlanders, with two companies of the 9th Devon Regiment to follow them and "mop up." The barrage was provided by twenty-four guns of the Australian field artillery firing in enfilade.<sup>105</sup> The moon was practically full, but the Gordons had reached their tapes, 300 yards from the village, without being discovered. The barrage fell 100 yards ahead of them, and advanced at the rate of 100 yards in three minutes, and, following it, they seized without difficulty the trench west of Bullecourt and began to bomb along it on both flanks.

<sup>103</sup> But not without excitement. The 2nd Battalion going in met a fatigue party coming out. The sap became congested and, seeing movement, the enemy shelled it. Major M. V. Southey (Melbourne), medical officer of the 2nd Battalion, kept his head and, calling on his men to follow, led them across the open to the shelter of a bank. "Looking back (wrote a stretcher-bearer, R. Morgan, of Meadowbank, N.S.W.) one could only see a huge cloud of smoke, and now and again a figure would emerge from it, running away from the place as hard as they could go. Those few minutes contained for me more excitement than I have experienced during the whole campaign."

<sup>104</sup> See Vol. III, p. 273.

<sup>105</sup> The artillery of the 62nd Division at the same time barraged a sector of the Hindenburg Line west of Bullecourt, as if preparatory to an attack there, and also shelled the south-west corner of the village, which was not being attacked.

To avoid being caught in the barrage, the 9th Battalion was not to advance until fourteen minutes after the artillery opened, when the barrage-line would have passed clear. At 3.58 the leading platoon climbed over the barricade. Seventy yards down the trench it was met by a shower of bombs, and was driven back despite its attempt to erect a bomb-stop. The next platoon, under Lieutenant Henzell,<sup>106</sup> then went over the barricade and began to bomb. Although rifle-grenadiers shot their missiles overhead to cut off the German bombers from their supplies, and a Lewis gun on the parapet endeavoured to keep the enemy in his trench, the bay immediately ahead of the Queenslanders remained an inferno of bursting grenades. The Queenslanders for a moment ran short of bombs, and the Germans, fighting most stubbornly, established machine-guns and snipers in craters outside the trench and threatened to encircle the attackers. The Lewis gunners and rifle-grenadiers had to be turned on to these.

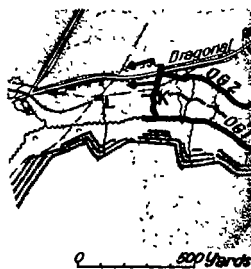


But just then a new supply of bombs arrived. After throwing a shower of them, Henzell and his men rushed round the traverse. Two or three Germans whom they found facing them over the next traverse disappeared. The Queenslanders continuing to bomb rushed several bays, in one of which was an abandoned *granatenwerfer* whose "pine-apple" bombs had been causing loss. Then a barrage of German bombs was again met. Men from the platoons in rear were brought up. The tussle began anew, but this time the Queenslanders put out Lewis gunners into the crater-field. The German bombing, at first heavy, did not maintain its strength. Observing the showers lessening, the Queenslanders made another rush and hustled the Germans with increasing speed. The next stubborn stand was near a German machine-gun position. Before this resistance was broken through, the German machine-gunners dismantled and carried off their gun, and, although the Queenslanders endeavoured to overtake

<sup>106</sup> Lieut. W. C. Henzell, M.C.; 9th Bn Accountant; of Brisbane, b. Woolloowin, Q'land, 23 March, 1893. Died, 6 June, 1939.

it, a German covering party with bombs slowed down their progress. Two more *granatenwerfer* were found, abandoned.<sup>107</sup> Part of the enemy made off towards O.G.2 through cross-trench "M," and then, at 5.15, a Scottish officer was seen standing on the parapet close ahead. It was Captain Gordon,<sup>108</sup> the senior forward officer of the Gordon Highlanders, whose men had recognised the Mills grenades and had withdrawn from two or three bays ahead of the Australian bombers.

In O.G.2 the attack by Captain Knightley's company of the 9th, carried through quickly, met with equally fierce opposition. The company was to establish four posts, each a platoon strong. The trench immediately ahead was too close to be bombarded by artillery. At 4 o'clock the two leading platoons, under Lieutenants Brown<sup>109</sup> and MacTaggart,<sup>110</sup> issued respectively north and south of the Diagonal Road. Brown's party, bombing along the trench north of the road, came on a German post which immediately fell back beyond the next cross-trench ("L"). The two officers then formed their posts a little short of "L," and opened covering fire while the two remaining platoons, under Lieutenant Ramkema and Sergeant Porter<sup>111</sup> continued the thrust. Near "L," where the road again passed through the trench, these two parties met and came under heavy fire from rifles, machine-guns, and a "grenade-thrower" at the cross-roads 250 yards farther on. Ramkema was hit through the elbow, and, coming back, told Captain Knightley where the *granatenwerfer* was. A Stokes mortar was turned upon it, and after a shower of



<sup>107</sup> Two *flammenwerfer* were found near the point at which the Germans had made their second stand. Both had been used. The machine-gun which the Germans attempted to withdraw was also found in a dugout captured by the Gordons.

<sup>108</sup> Capt. M. L. Gordon, 2nd Bn., Gordon Highlanders. Civil engineer; of Toronto, Canada; b. South Kensington, London, 27 Oct., 1882. Killed in action, 7 May, 1917.

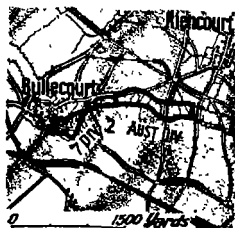
<sup>109</sup> Lieut. R. H. Brown, M.C.; 9th Bn. Stock-buyer; of Brisbane; b. Wellington, N.Z., 21 July, 1883.

<sup>110</sup> Lieut. W. S. MacTaggart, 9th Bn. Clerk; of Brisbane; b. Maryborough, Q'land, 5 Oct., 1886.

<sup>111</sup> C.S.M. W. A. Porter, D.C.M. (No. 5448; 9th Bn.). Sawyer; of Ipswich, Q'land, b. Ipswich, 24 Apr., 1887.

rifle-grenades Sergeant Porter pushed on. The nearest enemy post—a strong one, to judge by the number of rifles found abandoned—fled, Porter running along the parapet after the Germans pelting them with bombs. Two posts were placed in "L."<sup>112</sup> The final objective—the cross-roads—was not gained, but could not have been held unless the 7th Division had come up on the left.

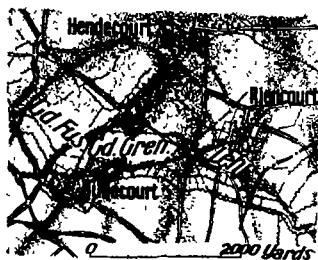
The Gordon Highlanders, having seized their first objective, went on and captured their second. On their extreme right Captain Gordon, immediately the Queenslanders joined him, went on with a non-commissioned officer and several men, but all were killed by fire from the same post at the cross-roads which had held back Knightley's company. The Germans attempted a local counter-attack up cross-trench "M," using a *flammenwerfer*; but an Australian post had been stationed here, and the man carrying the *flammenwerfer* was hit with a bomb, and this effort ended. The German artillery, however, which could take both objectives in enfilade, now descended upon the captured trenches with frightful intensity. For hour after hour the position was shrouded with a tawny cloud of brick-dust and shell-smoke. Further north, however, German reinforcements were seen moving across the open towards the village, and were fired on from the Australian line. Somewhat later the enemy was reported to be working reserves into the village from the north-west, and towards evening the appearance of figures moving back out of the dust-cloud led to a report that the 7th Division was retiring. Australians who had seen the Gordons that day scouted the notion—the "Jocks" had never yet failed them! This confidence proved to be justified; the figures were merely those of some returning carriers. The flank posts of the Scots and Queenslanders inter-locked, the Gordons taking over the nearest post in the Australian trench and *vice versa*. When at night the barrage eased and communication again became possible, it was found



<sup>112</sup> By Sergeants W. Greaves (Homestead, Q'land) and Porter. One post, originally established farther forward by Porter, had to be brought back.

that the British—Gordons and 9th Devon—were still holding not only the complete first objective, but all vital parts of the second. The bombardment had caused much loss,<sup>113</sup> but, through the magnificent fighting power of the 7th Division, the left flank of the Australians was henceforth secure.

The attack on May 7 fell upon the 3rd Guard Division, whose relief of the 98th R.I.R. in Bullecourt was, however, not yet complete. The disposition of the incoming regiments is shown in the marginal sketch. The history of the Guard Fusilier Regiment states that the Germans had on May 6 remarked the approach of reinforcements, and the attack was therefore expected. After the trenches had been lost, the 9th Grenadier Regiment was ordered to counter-attack in the evening, but the British, informed by their airmen,<sup>114</sup> "who were in the ascendant," shelled the point of assembly so severely that the projected advance appeared impossible.



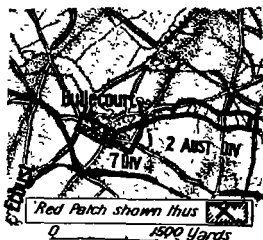
On the night of May 7th the 2nd Brigade, which had been relieved at Lagnicourt two nights earlier,<sup>115</sup> took over the left sector from the 1st Brigade. It faced a much simpler situation than its predecessors. The task on this flank henceforth was—for the British, to complete the capture of Bullecourt; for the Australians, to extend their left in O.G.2 and meet them, when they advanced, at the cross-roads near the north-east corner of the village. The 7th Division continued its attack at 11 o'clock next morning (May 8th), two companies of the 8th Devon attempting to secure, by

<sup>113</sup> The 2nd Gordon Highlanders lost 7 officers and 179 others. The 9th Battalion lost 1 officer and 159. In the 9th a large proportion of the wounds were caused by bombs.

<sup>114</sup> In spite of the recent astonishing activities of Captain Baron Manfred von Richthofen and his 11th Jagdstaffel, the British airmen were showing the utmost daring. The history of the Guard Fusilier Regiment says that the British airmen, only 150-300 feet from the ground, directed the artillery-fire and even chased individual men as they hopped from crater to crater. "Our airmen nowhere in sight," wrote a ration carrier of the 11/Guard Fusilier, "and the English are as cheeky as the devil." This evening a British aeroplane diving at the Germans in Bullecourt was observed by Lothar von Richthofen (brother of Manfred, who was still away on leave). Lothar flew to attack it, but was himself attacked and badly wounded by a British pilot from above him. In the general fighting not far from here this day Captain Albert Ball, the great British ace, of the 69th Squadron, was killed. His death was attributed by the Germans to Lothar, but the truth of this attribution is questioned in the British official history (*The War in the Air, Vol. III.*) and by Floyd Gibbons, a fair minded and painstaking author, in *The Red Knight of Germany*.

<sup>115</sup> By the 175th Brigade, 58th Division, lent for the purpose.

bombing, the south-west of Bullecourt, known as the "Red Patch."<sup>116</sup> The brilliant weather, which prevailed during practically the whole of the Second Battle of Bullecourt, had been broken by a night of rain, and the trenches were muddy. Before going far the two companies met with strong resistance at a dugout in O.G.1; the commander of one was killed, and after two attacks the attempt failed. The 2nd Australian Infantry Brigade, to divert attention from the British attack, bombed down O.G.2 to the same point that had been reached by Sergeant Porter of the 9th Battalion, meeting little or no opposition. Some of the neighbouring Germans, indeed, were probably unaware of this extension of the Australian flank, for that evening a party of them blundered into the new post, bringing down the artillery of both sides. This incident was reported as an attempt by the enemy to counter-attack;<sup>117</sup> but prisoners, captured through an extraordinarily gallant action of Sergeant Lay<sup>118</sup> of the 8th Battalion,<sup>119</sup> knew nothing of any such intention. As Lieutenant-Colonel Mitchell,<sup>120</sup> the young commander of the 8th, reported:



The enemy seem very windy, putting over a barrage for the slightest excuse. . . . When the enemy fired a flare it was carried (i.e., repeated) right along his line.<sup>121</sup>

<sup>116</sup> Or "Red Rectangle." So called because it was shown in red on the map accompanying the operation order.

<sup>117</sup> The incident was a remarkable one. The 8th Battalion in the newly-captured post saw Germans coming towards them from the west across the open and thence up the Diagonal Road. Bombs were exchanged. The Victorians fired their S.O.S. signal, and the protecting barrage came down. Green lights similar to those for S.O.S. now went up along the whole line. The German artillery, as well as those of the 7th and 2nd Australian Divisions, opened. This tremendous bombardment died down shortly after 10 p.m., but broke out again at 11.25 and 2.10. The sharp bombing tussle which had lasted for three-quarters of an hour on the Australian left seemed hardly sufficient cause for all this disturbance, yet it appears to have had no other.

<sup>118</sup> Capt. P. Lay, M.C., D.C.M., M.M.; 8th Bn. Farmer; of Ballan, Vic.; b. Ballan, 8 Feb., 1894.

<sup>119</sup> After the German party had been driven off the Victorians had heard someone groaning close outside their trench. Sergeant Lay went out to him, unarmed, but while doing so observed another German making back towards the Diagonal Road. Lay worked round behind this man, cutting him off and then went up to him. The German, a mere boy, stood with his rifle on guard while Lay boldly went up to him, took it from him, and brought him back a prisoner. The wounded man proved to be the N.C.O. in charge of the German party.

<sup>120</sup> Lieut.-Col. J. W. Mitchell, D.S.O. Commanded 8th Bn, 1917/18; and 2nd/8th Bn, A.I.F., 1939 Mechanic, of Warracknabeal, Vic; b. Warracknabeal, 16 March, 1891.

<sup>121</sup> The right brigade (3rd) reported heavy shelling at 5.52-6.10 p.m., 6.50, 7.50, and 9.20. At 7.50 a shell burst in the mess room at 3rd Brigade Headquarters, in a half-ruined house in Noreuil, but caused no casualties.

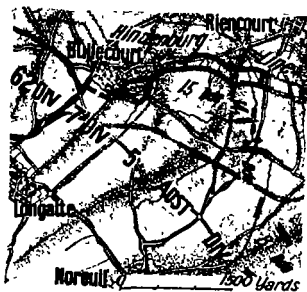


All three brigades of the 1st Division having now been employed by the 2nd Division in succession to its own three, it had become necessary to call back from Albert the 5th Division. This night (May 8th) the 14th (New South Wales) Brigade came into the line.

**5th Division  
takes over**

Although on that particular night recurring bombardments prevented progress in the work of fortification,<sup>122</sup> the position was now gradually crystallising into a normally organised sector of the front. A support trench had at last been dug, the old "jumping-off" trench of the 12th Brigade for April 11th being extended eastwards for this purpose. The new communication trench, east of Pioneer Trench, was approaching completion. Trenches were taking shape in front of Noreuil.<sup>123</sup> On the right flank in the Hindenburg Line mining was being planned.<sup>124</sup>

It was now possible to hold the front somewhat more lightly, and accordingly not only the 3rd Brigade, in the right sector of the Hindenburg Line, but the 7th, in front of Noreuil, was relieved by the 14th Brigade, which henceforth occupied its sector of the Hindenburg Line with only one battalion,<sup>125</sup> a second holding the posts on the right, and a third being stationed at the support trench, sunken road, and railway. On the following night (May 9th) a second brigade—the 15th (Victoria)—of the 5th Division relieved the 2nd Brigade in the sector west of the Central Road; and next morning the 5th Division (Major-General Hobbs) took over control of the line from the 2nd Division, which had had charge of the sector since April 14th.



<sup>122</sup> The 2nd Pioneers, sent up for this, were also hampered by the congestion in Pioneer Trench during the relief.

<sup>123</sup> Dug chiefly by the 6th and 7th Brigades.

<sup>124</sup> It was thought the Germans might begin tunnelling from their deep dugouts to undermine the Australian barricades. The Controller of Mines, Fifth Army (Lieut.-Col. B. W. Y. Danford, R.E.), visited the position on May 11.

<sup>125</sup> The 53rd Battalion, however, was more than equal to the 11th and 12th, which it relieved. Its acting commander was Major D. Thomson (Sydney), who had sailed from Australia as No 1 of the 1st Battalion, 1st Brigade, 1st Division. He died on 16 Oct., 1928, as the result of gassing received during the war.

These same days—although the troops and their immediate commanders, and, naturally, the enemy, were not yet aware of it—saw another and much more important change in the scheme of operations. In consequence of events to be explained in the next chapter, it had been decided to transfer to Flanders the main British effort. On May 9th orders issued for the movement, between May 15th and 22nd, of more than half the heavy artillery supporting I Anzac as well as of the three Australian "Army" field artillery brigades.<sup>126</sup> The projected Havrincourt offensive was abandoned, and the British armies at Arras were to direct their remaining efforts to securing a good defensive front. The attempts to attain this might still for a time disguise from the enemy the fact that the Arras offensive had ended. For the moment the Fifth Army continued its attempt to seize the remainder of Bullecourt.

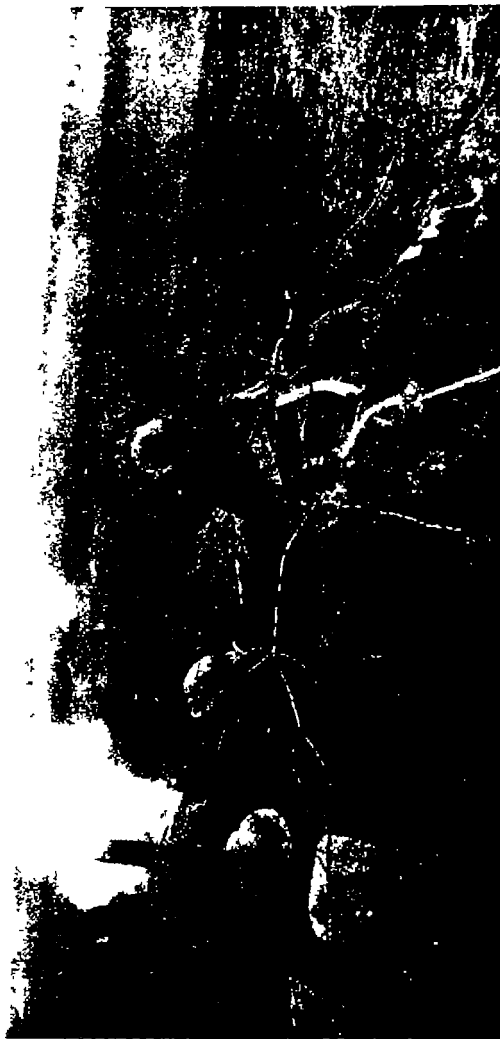
On May 9th a company of the 8th Devon had twice repeated the effort of that battalion to capture the Red Patch, but had again failed.<sup>127</sup> There followed two comparatively quiet days in which the 7th Division relieved its exhausted 20th Brigade<sup>128</sup> by the 91st, which was to renew the attack on May 12th. On the 10th orders were issued for the bombardment to be reduced as much as possible,<sup>129</sup> but the artillery activity did not, in fact, noticeably diminish on either side. The late afternoon and night of the 11th were, on the contrary, unusually disturbed. At 6.15 the enemy, observing movement—actually of carrying parties—in the 5th Division's lines, heavily shelled the front for an hour. Shortly afterwards numbers of Germans—reported by the 15th Brigade as a brigade strong, but, according to German records, a company carrying out a relief—were seen moving between Hendecourt and the sugar factory, and the Australian barrage came down. As had so often happened before, the German infantry, imagining that the Australians were attacking, fired their green

<sup>126</sup> That is, those (the 3rd, 6th, and 12th) specially allotted for transfer to any region, as distinguished from the divisional brigades of which two remained with each division (*see pp. 17-18*).

<sup>127</sup> All the officers having been hit, the second attempt was organised by the acting company sergeant-major.

<sup>128</sup> This brigade had lost 36 officers and 710 others in the partial capture of Bullecourt.

<sup>129</sup> Counter-battery work, night shooting, and firing on special targets were, however, to continue actively.



25. A POST OF THE 22ND MACHINE GUN COMPANY BESIDE THE NOREUIL VALLEY, FIRING AT A  
LOW-FLYING GERMAN AEROPLANE, MAY 1917

*Aust War Memorial Official Photo No E458*

*To face p 528*



26. A STOKES MORTAR OF THE 2ND BRIGADE IN THE HINDENBURG LINE. 8TH MAY, 1917  
The mortar is seen covered, on the left. The crew are Privates A. A. MacTaggart (whose  
work is mentioned in the records) and E. R. Carey.

signal for "annihilation fire," which British and Australian observers mistook for their own S.O.S., and down came a tremendous bombardment from both sides. Between 10 and 11 this uproar died away, but the Germans were still nervous, and at midnight golden "clusters"<sup>130</sup> went up along their line, again bringing down the artillery.<sup>131</sup>

The new British attempt to round off the capture of Bullecourt on May 12th was to be assisted by the 15th Australian Brigade reaching out to join hands with the British at the cross-roads near the north-east corner of the village. This was to be effected by two movements: four platoons of the 58th Battalion from O.G.2 were to attack the centres of German opposition immediately on their left—the large dugout in the Diagonal Road, and a small concrete machine-gun shelter between the two trenches; and, farther to the left, as soon as this shelter was taken, a company of the 58th from O.G.1 would advance over the open to the strong German post west of the cross-roads. Two companies of the 60th would move up and occupy the trenches vacated by the attacking troops. The first of these assaults would not be launched until the barrage covering the British attack lifted from the left company's objective, fourteen minutes after "zero." The objectives near the Australian flank in O.G.2—Diagonal Road and concrete shelter—would be bombarded by medium and light trench-mortars only.

The difficulties of this attack were enormously increased by the bombardments which drenched the area during the previous night. Casualties were numerous. Two Lewis guns of the 58th Battalion were buried, their crews killed or wounded. At 3.15 a.m. two of the Stokes mortars, which in half-an-hour's time were to carry out the bombardment,<sup>132</sup> were buried together with their crews. The

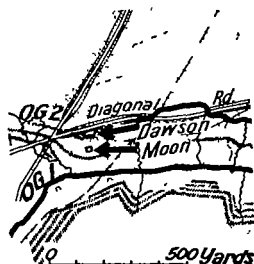
<sup>130</sup> Then the German signal for "barrage." Each flare burst into a brilliant shower of golden lights resembling spangles.

<sup>131</sup> The artillery activity during these days caused constant loss. While the 59th Battalion was going up to the line, its commander (Lieutenant-Colonel H. T. C. Layh) and medical officer (Captain N. J. Bullen), as well as the chaplain attached to the battalion, were gassed. In the 53rd Lieutenant J. M. Jefferson, and in the 55th Captain A. R. Gardner, were killed. (Layh belonged to Melbourne; Bullen, who died of wounds on 16 Oct., 1917, to Malvern, Vic.; Jefferson to Sydney, and Gardner to Woollahra, N.S.W.)

<sup>132</sup> Firing from the sunken road south of the Hindenburg Line,

crews were dug out by Private McBride,<sup>133</sup> and two other guns were hurried forward from the railway in time. But so heavy had been the casualties of the 58th that a company of the 59th had to be brought up to strengthen the garrison of O.G.1.

The attack down O.G.2, towards the big dugout, was made by three platoons of the 58th under Lieutenant Dawson,<sup>134</sup> but was at first held up by the same strong resistance that had always met attempts to extend the flank there. Beaten back, Dawson's force deluged the trench with rifle-grenades, but the Germans, bringing up their bombers in successive parties of about a dozen men, held on. The assault by a platoon under Lieutenant Moon<sup>135</sup> upon the concrete shelter south of the trench had also been held up. Part of the company to attack farther west started from O.G.1 before this post had been suppressed, and was drawn into the bombing there. Lieutenant Topp,<sup>136</sup> leading these troops and trying to direct them towards their proper objective, was shot through the head, and Lieutenants Syder<sup>137</sup> and Robertson<sup>138</sup> were wounded.



Lieutenant Moon, a slight, modest boy, whom his brigadier, General Elliott, had been inclined to regard as too diffident for command, was the leader in this bombing. He also had been hit in the face and spun round, temporarily dazed, in the first advance, and his men had wavered. But, calling "Come on, boys, don't turn me down," he had steadied them; and now, after twenty minutes' heavy fighting, the Germans were driven out of the shelter and scrambled northwards to join their friends in O.G.2. Moon and his men, followed by

<sup>133</sup> Pte. A. G. McBride, M.M. (No. 454; 15th L.T.M. Bty.). Hairdresser; of Fitzroy, Vic.; b. Warracknabeal, Vic., 8 June, 1888.

<sup>134</sup> Capt. F. C. Dawson, D.S.O., M.C.; 58th Bn. Engineer; of St. Kilda, Vic.; b. Charters Towers, Q'land, 11 June, 1888.

<sup>135</sup> Capt. R. V. Moon, V.C.; 58th Bn. Bank clerk; of Maffra, Vic.; b. Bacchus Marsh, Vic., 14 Aug., 1892.

<sup>136</sup> Lieut. S. J. Topp, 58th Bn. Clerk; of Elsternwick, Vic.; b. Caulfield, Vic., 1880. Killed in action, 12 May, 1917.

<sup>137</sup> Lieut. J. Syder, 58th Bn. Bank clerk; of Ascot Vale, Vic.; b. Yarraville, Vic., 11 May, 1892.

<sup>138</sup> Lieut. A. Robertson, 58th Bn. Labourer; of Taggerty, Vic.; b. Wickham, Bucks, Eng., 1892.

Lieutenant G. P. Hooper<sup>139</sup> and a carrying party of the 58th and 60th, moved after them and joined Dawson's company, which was still attacking the barricade. Dawson had been reinforced, the 60th Battalion having sent up four bombing squads, as well as rifle-grenadiers and Lewis gunners. While Dawson took in hand the organising of these intermingled troops, Moon with Lance-Corporal Free<sup>140</sup> led the bombers.

To dislodge the enemy, Moon directed a Lewis gun team to jump out into a shell-hole on the left from which they could partly enfilade the trench. A minute or two later the Germans broke back to the Diagonal Road. Moon followed, emerged alone into the cutting, and emptied his rifle into them. He was bombed back into the trench, Free assisting his escape by shooting down the leading German bomber. After directing a shower of grenades into the cutting, Moon and the nearest Victorians again burst into it. The foremost Germans had been shot down, and it was found that the survivors had, for the moment, withdrawn for shelter into the dugout entrances. Before they could emerge. Moon and his men, firing into the entrances, had them trapped, and kept them there while the rest of the attacking party—now not more than thirty strong—was brought up by Dawson, who till then had been pushing forward bombs and reinforcements. Moon began to consolidate in the cutting, while Dawson, taking charge of the "mopping up," extracted from the dugouts no less than 186 Germans including two officers—40 more than were taken by the Australians on May 3-6th. The actual cross-roads could not be attained by daylight, being covered by fire from another German post. Having no touch with any party on the left, Moon placed a Lewis gun to fire down the road. Next, looking over the edge of the cutting to locate the trench beyond, he was again hit through the face, and this time put out of action.<sup>141</sup> Germans sniping up the road afterwards forced Dawson to withdraw his men from it for the time being.

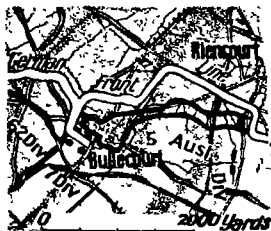
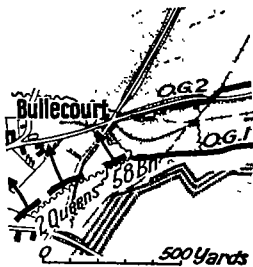
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<sup>139</sup> Lieut. G. P. Hooper, 58th Bn. Public servant; of Baroona Hill, Brisbane; b. Indooroopilly, Q'land, 6 Aug., 1889.

<sup>140</sup> Sgt C. E. Free, D.C.M. (No. 806; 58th Bn.). Printer; of Yarraville, Vic.; b. Yarraville, 12 March, 1895.

<sup>141</sup> The official report of Moon's action states that, "sitting down, with blood and sweat pouring from him, he remarked: 'It was a hard fight, boys; I've got three cracks, and not one of them good enough for Blighty'" (i.e., for sending to hospital in England). For his gallant and effective leading, he was awarded the Victoria Cross.

Meanwhile, of the company of the 58th that was to attack farther left, the two left platoons under Lieutenant Kidd<sup>142</sup> had without difficulty reached their objective, the road-bank west of the cross-roads. Somewhat later, British infantry—part of the 2nd Queens—reached the same road seventy yards farther west, and Kidd subsequently obtained touch with them. The 91st Brigade had secured its objective, except at the south-west corner of the village, where junction with the 62nd Division was not obtained. As the situation cleared, it was found that in this quarter the British and German positions were keyed into one another in an extraordinary manner, so that each had their opponents on both sides of them. The Australian position at the north-eastern end, though the cross-roads were unattainable during daylight, was quickly rounded off after nightfall. But attacks by the 91st Brigade, repeated again and again until May 15th,<sup>143</sup> could not clear the Germans from their enclave at the south-western corner.



<sup>142</sup> Lieut. R. Kidd, 58th Bn. Clerk; of Yea, Vic.; b. Barry's Reef, Vic., 20 Dec., 1893. Killed in action, 25 Oct., 1917.

<sup>143</sup> The original attack by this brigade on May 12 was made by the 2nd Queen's, 1st South Staffordshire, and two companies of 21st Manchester. Later, three companies of 22nd Manchester reinforced. A change was made in the brigade command, and next day at 3.40 the 2nd Warwickshire attacked the Germans in the south-west corner from the front, while the 22nd Manchester attacked them from the rear. The latter were held up by the British barrage, and the attack failed. During May 13 the 1st South Staffordshire attempted several bombing attacks, but without success; at 7 p.m. a company of the 21st Manchester attacked with the same result. On May 14 two companies of the 1st Royal Welch Fusiliers (lent to the 91st Brigade) attacked at 2.10 and 4 a.m., but were repelled by machine-gun fire. Its two other companies attacked at 6.15, but were held up. One of them attacked again, at 2.30, and made headway, but had to fall back through lack of ammunition, a dump having been destroyed. On May 15, immediately before relief by the 174th Brigade, the 1st Royal Welch Fusiliers were again about to attack when the Germans counter-attacked and recaptured some of the ground taken from them on May 14. The 2/1st H.A.C., 1st R.W. Fusiliers, and 21st Manchester retook the general line, and were then relieved. In all this fighting the 91st Brigade lost 27 officers and 577 others. The casualties of the R.W. Fusiliers and 2/1st H.A.C. are not shown in the available records. This terrible fighting is well described from the German side in the *History of the Guard Fusilier Regiment*, pp. 169-176.



The 15th Brigade's attack had fallen upon the left flank of the 9th Grenadier Regiment (3rd Guard Division).<sup>144</sup> This striking success was not achieved without sharp loss, amounting to 16 officers and some 300 others in the six companies engaged.<sup>145</sup> With its task completely achieved, the brigade handed over the line during the following night (May 12/13th) to the 173rd Brigade of the 58th Division, a newly-arrived formation of Londoners who were for the first time entering the front line under battle conditions. The night was a disturbed one, the relief was greatly delayed,<sup>146</sup> and the incoming battalions (2/3rd and 2/4th London Regiment) suffered 80 casualties in the process. But when the Germans at day-break counter-attacked the position captured by the Australians, the Londoners beat them off and took four prisoners. Three days later the 7th Division handed over the Bullecourt position to another London brigade—the 175th.<sup>147</sup> The 7th Division was relieved and the 58th Division now took control of the front held by its own troops, comprising Bullecourt and the original left sector of the Australian front. Henceforth the only part of the Hindenburg Line occupied by the Australians was from Pioneer Trench (Central Road) to the extreme right.

<sup>144</sup> The prisoners were chiefly from the 1/9th Grenadier, but included a few of the 11. Battalion, and of the 5th Guard Field Artillery Regiment.

<sup>145</sup> The total loss in the 58th was 11 officers and 234 others, in the 60th 4 officers and 105 others. Lieutenant S. J. Topp was shot through the head; Captain N. G. Pelton (commander of Dawson's company) and Lieutenant W. G. Barlow (bombing officer) killed by shell-fire; Lieutenant G. P. Hooper was severely wounded by a shot through the chest; Lieutenant S. Fraser killed; and Lieutenants B. Anderson, J. Syder, A. Robertson, G. F. Focken, and the medical officer, Captain V. M. Coppleson, wounded; Lieutenant L. S. Davis, though blown up by a shell, reorganised the right of Pelton's company. In the two companies of the 60th which assisted, Lieutenant C. A. Leslie was killed, and Captain R. J. Dickson, Captain J. C. Barrie and Lieutenant D. J. O'Connor were wounded; Lieutenant W. R. Gannon took charge. In the 59th Major H. A. Kuring, who temporarily succeeded Colonel Layh in command, was wounded. (Topp belonged to Elsternwick, Vic.; Pelton to Footscray, Vic.; Barlow to Daylesford, Vic.; Hooper to Baroona Hill, Brisbane; Fraser to Byaduk, Vic.; Anderson to Camberwell, Vic.; Syder to Ascot Vale, Vic.; Robertson to Taggerty, Vic.; Focken to Middle Park, Vic.; Coppleson to Sydney; Davis to Albert Park, Vic.; Leslie to North Carlton, Vic., and Port Pirie, S. Aust.; Dickson to Warrnambool, Vic.; Barrie to Brighton Beach, Vic.; O'Connor to Albert Park, Vic.; Gannon, who died of wounds on 6 Sept., 1918, to Jumbunna, Vic.; Kuring to Carisbrook, Vic.)

<sup>146</sup> The delay was partly due to the fact that the Germans were playing two searchlights on this front. Moreover, at 3.50, when the Germans attacked, the S.O.S. signal was sent (on the power buzzer). The consequent artillery-fire lasted until after 5 a.m. The 57th Battalion was still in the line and had to be dribbled back through Pioneer Trench in small parties by daylight.

<sup>147</sup> This was the brigade which had previously been lent to the 2nd Australian Division to hold the Lagnicourt sector, and set free the 2nd Brigade. It had been relieved in the Lagnicourt sector on May 12/13 by the 8th Australian Brigade.

The local policy now was merely to round off and fortify the front, at the same time keeping up an appearance of activity. The difficult task of wiring off the right flank in the Hindenburg Line, where the trenches of the two sides ran into one another, was, as has already been mentioned,<sup>148</sup> wrongly believed to have been completed. The 258th (British) Tunnelling Company<sup>149</sup> began to sink shafts there for listening galleries. The 14th Field Company had erected entanglement farther south, in prolongation of the flank belt, and on the night of the 13th a quantity of wire on "knife-rests" (*chevaux de frise*) was put out from Ostrich Avenue. To cause the enemy loss, General Gough directed that, as soon as the wind was favourable, drums of gas in great numbers should be projected into the German lines near Quéant and Havrincourt. The battle was merging into mere trench warfare.

On the 14th of May, however, the artillery-fire of both sides again became very active. The infantry's flare signal for an S.O.S. barrage had been changed to a succession of single red flares, but the Germans also had changed their signals, and there constantly burst along the line German flares throwing two red lights which were easily confused with the British signal. Actually, they were fired by the German infantry to inform its artillery that shells were dropping short; and, as during these days the German artillery seldom opened without deluging its own troops, these flares went up in dozens during every strong German barrage.

From the early morning of the 14th, when the relief of the 53rd Battalion by the 54th (New South Wales) was much hampered by German bombardment, the enemy shell-fire on the fronts of the 5th Australian and 58th Divisions continued all day. During the afternoon parties of Germans were seen moving up from the back area between Riencourt and Hendecourt, and were shelled by the British artillery. The bombardment of the front line by the enemy eased after dusk,

<sup>148</sup> See pp 519-20

<sup>149</sup> This company had been lent to the 2nd Australian Division for making dugouts. In the pressure of the fighting the divisional staff employed it for digging communication trenches. This brought a sharp inquiry from army headquarters, which afterwards directed that the tunnellers were to be employed henceforth on their proper work.

but the villages in rear, and the valleys sheltering the artillery, were now systematically shelled with gas.<sup>150</sup>

At 1 a.m. on May 15th there again descended on the extreme right flank of the Australians in the Hindenburg Line. and upon that line for 250 yards west of it, an intense fire from German heavy and light trench-mortars, causing many casualties and wrecking the trenches, especially the northern end of cross-trench "F." At 2.45 the German artillery of various calibres joined in, extending its shell-fire over the whole Bullecourt-Riencourt front. The enemy's machine-guns also were firing, the bombardment which thus culminated being the heaviest that the troops of the 5th Division subjected to it had yet experienced.<sup>151</sup> At the sound of increased gun-fire (2.50 a.m.), several Australian batteries were ordered to open slowly on their S.O.S. barrage lines. At 3.40 the noise appeared to increase, and all batteries opened, but those in Noreuil valley found themselves being systematically shelled by German counter-batteries. The British counter-batteries were accordingly turned on. An S.O.S. signal was received at 4.5, but shortly afterwards the uproar began to die away. All telephone lines had long since been cut, and the 14th Brigade had no high-power buzzer, but inquiry of the commanders of the 14th Brigade and of the 54th Battalion showed that they had heard nothing of any assault. The artillery staff in the 58th Division's sector said that no attack had occurred there, and the 5th Division's artillery commander was of opinion that the whole disturbance was again due to German flares being mistaken for British. His batteries maintained their barrage, but at 6.30 he asked that it should be terminated as soon as possible.

A quarter of an hour later (6.45) a message sent at 4.15 by Major Lecky<sup>152</sup> of the 54th, commanding in the front line,

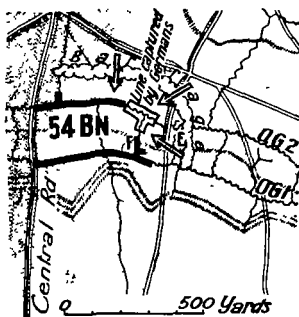
<sup>150</sup> A fatigue party of two officers and 120 men of the 60th Battalion was at Noreuil when the Germans gassed it. The high-explosive shell falling at the same time penned the troops in the sunken roads, where the gas lay thickest. When the bombardment seemed to have ended, the men removed their masks and some were thus caught by a second bombardment. Others were gassed running out, with their own gas-masks only half-fitted, to put gas-masks on the wounded who were lying helpless. Eighteen of the 60th were gassed, and about forty suffered some ill-effects. The mess-room at brigade headquarters in Noreuil was for the second time hit, this time by a gas-shell which, however, did no damage.

<sup>151</sup> The 5th Division had not taken part in the Battles of Pozieres and Mouquet Farm.

<sup>152</sup> Major C. S. Lecky, D.S.O.; 54th Bn. Bank clerk, of Longueville, N.S.W.; b Belfast, Ireland, 20 Aug., 1889.

reached Lieutenant-Colonel Midgley in the sunken road north of the railway, stating that the Germans had attacked all along the line and that on the right flank the situation was doubtful, the right company having been "wiped out" by the previous bombardment. Midgley was well aware that by the time this message reached him, Lecky's counter-attack must have been carried out, and the trench either re-won or definitely lost. At 7.30, hearing from Captain Morris that the Germans were again "massing" on the right and that reinforcements were wanted, and from Lieutenant McArthur<sup>153</sup> that the Londoners were helping to hold his line while he was organising a counter-attack "to win back as much as I can," Midgley asked assistance from Colonel Scott of the battalion (56th) holding the posts in front of Noreuil. Scott sent two sections of bombers,<sup>154</sup> and set all his headquarters' men carrying bombs. A company of the 55th was also ordered up, and reached the front at 11.

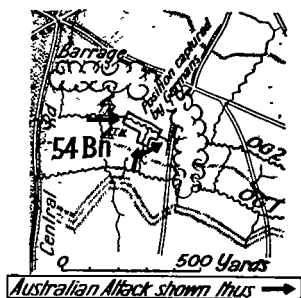
But before then the crisis was completely over. At 3.40 the shattering bombardment of trench-mortars on the front line had ceased; the dense curtain of shell-fire had been lowered farther back; and the German infantry had attempted to attack. Along the whole front they had been beaten off by riflemen and Lewis gunners before reaching the trench, leaving many dead and wounded in No-Man's Land; but attacking from cross-trench "E" in two parties, respectively north and south of O.G.2, the Germans seized the Australian barricade and the trench immediately behind it, and also entered one of the T-head saps projecting from cross-trench "F." Here they were checked by bombing, but their supports arriving helped forward the advance as far as the opening of "F" into O.G.2, and from there penetrated for seventy-five yards down the cross-trench.



<sup>153</sup> Lieut. D. McArthur, M.C., 54th Bn. Hospital attendant; of Sydney; b. Portfield, Chichester, Sussex, Eng., 1885. Killed in action, 1 Sept., 1918.

<sup>154</sup> Under Lieut. R. J. Poore (Fernbank, Vic.; died 15 July, 1940), commanding the platoon nearest to the 54th's flank.

At this stage it was stopped, largely through the fire of machine-guns of the 14th Company posted very close to the flank by Lieutenant Brown,<sup>155</sup> and of three Stokes mortars of the 14th L.T.M. Battery, stationed in cross-trench "G" as a protection to the flank. During the German bombardment one of these, in a particularly hot corner, had been temporarily put out of action, but a member of its crew, Private Christie,<sup>156</sup> recognising the futility of setting it up again in the same position, ran out with it into No-Man's Land in front of O.G.2, telling two other men to follow him with ammunition. From this position he fired thirty rounds into the advancing enemy, while the other guns kept a barrage on the Noreuil-Riencourt road, shattering the German supports and hampering the bringing up of bombs.<sup>157</sup> An immediate counter-attack led by a sergeant of the 54th failed, its leader being wounded. A double counter-attack was now launched, one party bombing along O.G.2 and a second up cross-trench "F." These drove the Germans into the end of the former Australian position in O.G.2. While they were pocketed here, a third party of Australians charged diagonally across the open from "F," caught the Germans crowded in O.G.2, and shot and bombed them without mercy. A number broke from the trench across the open, where many were killed by rifles or machine-guns, or destroyed in the barrage. All who remained in the trench are said to have been killed or wounded.



The London troops (58th Division) in O.G.1 west of the Central Road came to the assistance of the 54th during this fight, taking over part of its trench and thus allowing it to reinforce its hard-pressed flank. This assistance was sent in spite of the fact that the Londoners also had sustained

<sup>155</sup> Lieut. A. T. Brown, D.C.M., 14th M.G. Coy. School teacher; of Yass district, N.S.W.; b. Dalton, N.S.W., 10 May, 1887.

<sup>156</sup> Cpl. J. A. Christie, D.C.M. (No. 1631; 14th L.T.M. Bty.). Labourer, of Widgiewa, N.S.W.; b. Perth, Scotland, 1891.

<sup>157</sup> Christie afterwards, though wounded, brought back his gun to O.G.1 and engaged a German *granatenwerfer*.

heavy, prolonged bombardment,<sup>158</sup> and were being seriously attacked. On their front the Germans, advancing in waves, were crushed by the barrage called down by the British S.O.S. flares, and by the rifles and Lewis guns of the infantry, which was for the first time facing an attack. A few of the enemy reached the trenches of the 2/3rd London, but were driven out by immediate counter-attack.

The enemy's attempt had extended to Bullecourt also, and here achieved its only semblance of success, the tired garrison of the 7th Division, then in course of relief, being as already related,<sup>159</sup> driven from some of the posts captured on May 12th but immediately recapturing most of the lost ground.

The actual German attack had been repelled with insignificant loss, but the previous bombardment had caused severe casualties, amounting to 400 in the 14th Australian Brigade<sup>160</sup> and 300 in the 173rd (London) Brigade.

General von Moser's memoirs show that this counter-attack was the outcome of many heartburnings and some sharp conflict of opinion on the German side. In one of their early counter-attacks the Germans had captured an order for the original advance of May 3, and had learnt how extensive were its objectives. As the results had fallen so far short of the intention, von Moser had formed the opinion that no valid reason existed for continuing the difficult counter-attacks. In this, however, he was directly overruled by the army commander, the newly-arrived General Otto von Below. He had accordingly decided that the nest "which the tough English try to widen right and left" should be bombarded by all available artillery and trench-mortars until May 9, when the 3rd Guard Division should attack it.<sup>161</sup>

In the midst of the subsequent preparations the chief of the general staff of the army, evidently doubting the sufficiency of the bombardment, arranged direct with the artillery commander of the 3rd Guard Division to increase the supply of ammunition, and, as the additional supplies would not arrive until May 14, postponed the attack until the 15th. There followed "dramatic word-fights" between the commanders of the division and of the artillery, and Moser also protested, but the decision stood. The Lehr Regiment was sent on May 11 to Sauchy Lestrée to practise the assault, the 91st R.I.R. (2nd Guard Reserve Division) taking its place. The companies of the Lehr were replenished with reinforcements.<sup>162</sup> The

<sup>158</sup> Twelve of their Lewis guns were buried or destroyed by shell-fire, and practically the whole reserve supply of bombs blown up.

<sup>159</sup> See footnote 143, on p. 532.

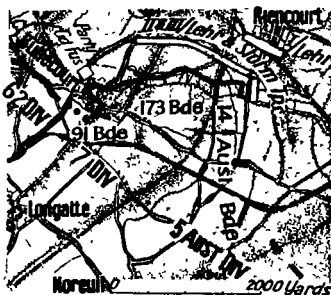
<sup>160</sup> Of these, the 54th Battalion lost 4 officers and 282 others, and the 56th 3 officers and 60 others.

<sup>161</sup> *Feldzugs-aufzeichnungen*, by General von Moser, p. 174.

<sup>162</sup> About twenty were allotted to each company.

men were informed that, as a crack unit, theirs had been chosen for the task;<sup>163</sup> the assault-troops were selected, and the attack was practised against dummy trenches representing those to be recaptured. In particular, the troops rehearsed their assembly, so that, if—as before—they came under fire and leaders were hit, the men would know what to do.

On the evening of May 14, during a lull in the artillery-fire, the II and III Battalions assembled without difficulty in the Moulin Sans Souci road, ready to attack, the 91st R.I.R. being prepared to take over the position when captured. During that night and the early hours of next day, thirty-one batteries bombarded the English nest "with about 60,000 high-explosive and gas-shells." Moser himself at 5 a.m. took his station at an observation post in the tower of Oisy church. The result was a shock and disappointment.<sup>164</sup>



*German attack on May 15.*

This, the seventh general counter-attack, was the last attempt at recapture made by the Germans. Their temporary success in penetrating the Australian right in O.G.2 drew attention to the fact that the wire defences had not been completed there, and the 14th Field Company was immediately ordered to complete them. As previously on May 6th, the night following the German counter-attack proved extraordinarily favourable for this purpose, the Germans being weary. In front of the 8th Brigade north of Lagnicourt<sup>165</sup> the quietude was so marked as to arouse a false suspicion that they had retired.<sup>166</sup> In these circumstances Lieutenant Green<sup>167</sup> and

<sup>163</sup> The enterprise was to be known as "Potsdam"

<sup>164</sup> Moser attributes the failure of the attack to the delay enjoined by the army commander, which, he says, allowed the British artillery to be greatly increased. Actually, it had been very greatly diminished. The Germans noted that their casualties had been caused chiefly by Lewis gun fire.

<sup>165</sup> This brigade had relieved the 175th on May 12/13.

<sup>166</sup> Colour was lent by this quietude to the impression, always existing at General Gough's headquarters, that the enemy intended to retire to the Drocourt-Queant line. A captured German officer and other prisoners had spoken of a withdrawal to be commenced at sundown on May 15, and the unusual silence led the staff of the 8th Australian Brigade in the Lagnicourt sector to suspect that the retirement was in progress. Lieutenant W. L. Thomason (Cottesloe, W. Aust.) of the 32nd Battalion, who during the night personally found three of the advanced German posts on his front abandoned, was at 2.45 a.m. sent out with a patrol to endeavour to enter the actual "Balcony Trench," 700 yards from the 8th Brigade's line. Working along the eastern side of the Hironnelle valley, he came, at 600 yards, on a strong German post. The patrol was roughly handled in the exchange of bombs that followed, and Thomason, who fought with his revolver until he was shot in the head, was captured.

<sup>167</sup> Lieut E. O. K. Green, 14th Field Coy., Engrs Civil engineer of Petersham, N.S.W., b. Gloucester, N.S.W., 14 Dec., 1893.

25 men, in spite of a few bombs thrown by the enemy,<sup>168</sup> succeeded in erecting a "single-apron" wire fence beyond the barricade in O.G.2.<sup>169</sup>

On the front of the 173rd Brigade in Bullecourt, also, there were now signs of enemy retirement, and here they were better grounded. In the early hours of May 17th, when that brigade carried out an operation already planned for capturing the remainder of Bullecourt, the enemy was found in the village and 40 were captured, but it became clear from their statements that the Germans were in the act of withdrawing from Bullecourt, and that it was only through unintentional delay in demolishing the dugouts that the withdrawal had not been completed. The British penetrated beyond the village and occupied O.G.2 ("Bovis Trench"), north of which the Germans were found to be holding a line of posts.

German accounts show that, when the counter-attack by the 3rd Guard Division failed, General von Moser recommended that Bullecourt should be given up. The army commander agreed. Pioneers were sent forward to blow up the dugouts, but at least one of their parties lost its way and was captured by the 58th British Division, which attacked during the operation. It was a dark night, rendered so dense by the dust of bombardment, that the German artillery could not see the flares of their infantry. The history of the Guard Fusilier Regiment (which, however, is in error as to the time of the attack and withdrawal) states that its companies retired in good order despite the bombing.<sup>170</sup> The 3rd Guard Division was relieved on May 18 by the 26th Reserve Division, and the XIV Reserve Corps was shortly afterwards transferred to the Fourth German Army in Flanders.

Thus ended the Second Battle of Bullecourt. Part of the uncaptured remnant of the Hindenburg Line was seized by the Third Army on May 20th when the Battle of Arras again flickered up before its close; but, to the last, a portion of the support line in that sector remained in German hands. On May 26th<sup>171</sup> the 5th Australian Division was relieved by the

<sup>168</sup> Some of the enemy were killed, and, as on May 6/7, the Australians captured several prisoners—an officer and two men, wounded, and a medical orderly, who was attending to them.

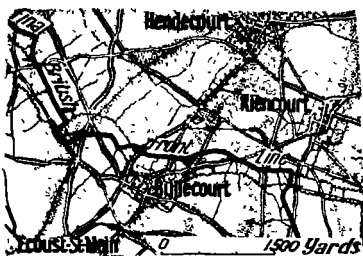
<sup>169</sup> One of the chief difficulties in all the wiring operations on this front was the distance—two miles—over which the material had to be carried to reach the front. An intermediate dump was eventually formed between Noreuil and the front. Moreover, it was found best not to attempt the carriage of material and erection of entanglement on the same night. It was also advantageous for the wiring party to reach the trenches before dusk, so that it could see the position, ascertain the situation of the local dump, and devote the whole night to work. *Chevaux-de-frise* made with "corkscrew" stakes were found to provide a good obstacle, and could be made under shelter and then taken out.

<sup>170</sup> A man of that regiment, left behind wounded in Bullecourt, succeeded in reaching the German lines on the night of May 30.

<sup>171</sup> The firing of gas into the German line near Quéant occurred on the previous day, the wind being for the first time favourable.



20th British, and the I Anzac Corps by the IV Corps. Of the two chief gains of the great battle of May 3rd only one had been retained. Fresnoy, after being handed over by the Canadians to 5th British Division, was recaptured by the enemy. But the position taken by the 2nd Australian Division remained incorporated in the British front<sup>172</sup> until the Germans seized it in their offensive of March 1918.



On the German side, although the 3rd Guard Division played a fine part, the defence of Bullecourt is justifiably regarded as chiefly an achievement—and a splendid one—of Wurttemberg troops. The fighting was as fierce and stubborn as any in the First Battle of the Somme,<sup>173</sup> and the infantry of the 27th Division lost, between May 3 and 6, 2,176 men. Its historians admit the failure of its left. Here, says the history of the 124th I.R., "in spite of all endeavours . . . success this time was permanently denied to the regiment. But neither did the forces freshly brought up, nor the subsequent attempts, achieve success. It was no longer found possible to drive back the 'English' at this point."

It remains to estimate the influence of the Bullecourt fighting, both on the general results of the Battle of Arras and within the A.I.F. Initiated on April 11th as a bold but highly imprudent attempt to assist the Third Army in breaking the German line, it became in its second phase part of a "wearing-down" struggle sustained to assist the French. Gough's insistence upon again attempting to reach Riencourt and Hendecourt, and upon

#### **The results of Bullecourt**

<sup>172</sup> When the 5th Australian Division left it, most of this front had been wired with a "double-apron" fence. In twelve days the 8th Field Company had put out 1,150 coils of wire in the Lagnicourt sector. The rear lines also had been largely wired, but labour had necessarily been diverted from these to the Bullecourt fighting. The 258th Tunnelling Company had by that date, with the assistance of the 5th Australian Pioneer Battalion, completed a defensive mining system at the eastern block in the Hindenburg Line. A third communication trench, west of the Central Road, was afterwards dug by the British, who had already completed a trench ("Bullecourt Avenue") to the south-eastern corner of Bullecourt. Pioneer Trench (along the Central Road), which, despite many complaints as to its condition, had alone made possible the Australian occupation, was several times destroyed by shell-fire and, after continued repairs, eventually fell into disuse. It was not even marked on the maps of this front printed in 1918.

<sup>173</sup> A man of the II/Guard Fusilier wrote: "Everyone says it is far worse here than on the Somme." General von Moser himself states: "By common consent the fighting is much bitterer than on the Somme."

again throwing his flank into the re-entrant between Quéant and Bullecourt, loaded the second operation with two of the difficulties of the first, but by sheer spirit the 6th Australian Brigade succeeded and held on. This outstanding achievement, which was not surpassed in the history of the A.I.F., provided almost the only compensation for the great British effort of May 3rd; and the most valuable result of the struggle in which successive brigades retained and enlarged that seemingly impossible foothold was probably the cheering note which it was possible to maintain almost daily in the British *communiqués* during the last stage of the Battle of Arras.<sup>174</sup>

That the *communiqués* did not indicate how often the effort referred to was mainly or solely Australian, was not unnaturally a cause of some disappointment to the oversea troops, but was definitely to the benefit of the Allied cause, which could only have been damaged by any emphasising of the relative effectiveness of British and dominion forces in this battle. The Germans were only too quick to seize upon the point. Crown Prince Rupprecht in his diary,<sup>175</sup> under 5th May, 1917, noted:

According to unanimous descriptions from the front, the English troops show themselves far less tough to repulse than formerly, with the exception of the Canadians and Australians, who are on all sides praised for their bravery and skill in making use of the ground.

That any such general conclusions were at this stage drawn by the British staff is improbable, although a message from Haig after the defeat of the German counter-attack on May 6th glowed with his personal admiration.

The capture of the Hindenburg Line east of Bullecourt, and the manner in which it has been held . . . against such constant and desperate efforts to retake it, will rank high among the great deeds of the war and is helping very appreciably in wearing out the enemy. The fine initiative shown by all commanders down to the lowest is admirable.<sup>176</sup>

There is no question that the second battle was an exhausting one for the German units engaged, but, like those of Pozières and Mouquet Farm, it could not be justified on that ground. The only justifiable reason for thrusting a

<sup>174</sup> The fighting at Bullecourt and Fresnoy was the chief item in the British *communiqué* of May 5; on May 6, 7, 8, and 9 the main item was provided from Bullecourt, which was again referred to on May 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17. On May 15 a British success was wrongly ascribed to the Australians.

<sup>175</sup> *Mein Kriegstagebuch*, Vol. II, p. 161.

<sup>176</sup> Haig's appreciation was further expressed by a message on May 12.

force into such a position as that won by the Australians at Moquet Farm, or in the Riencourt re-entrant, would be to gain some outstanding advantage for subsequent manoeuvre, and this was, in fact, the object in both those operations. But both were directed against points to which the German reserves had already been attracted, and both were undertaken in face of great tactical difficulties. It is true that after these half-successful advances the attacking troops offered so tempting a bait that they were bound to be repeatedly counter-attacked, and therefore had the chance of causing loss to the enemy; but, being counter-attacked under conditions favourable to him and most difficult for themselves, they were unlikely to wear him down as quickly as he exhausted them. In the Second Battle of Bullecourt the Germans launched against the Australians seven general counter-attacks and perhaps a dozen minor ones.<sup>177</sup> Whether the German loss in these amounted to 7,000, the casualties of the three Australian divisions that were drawn in, may be seriously doubted.

In the two battles of Bullecourt four Australian divisions suffered 10,000 casualties, roughly 3,000 in the first battle and 7,000 in the second.<sup>178</sup> In addition to its general results,

<sup>177</sup> The latter were undertaken on the initiative of local commanders.

<sup>178</sup> The detailed figures are:—

<i>4th Australian Division.</i>			
4th Infantry Brigade.		12th Infantry Brigade.	
	OFF. O.R.		OFF. O.R.
13th Bn. ..	21 482	46th Bn. ..	9 364
14th Bn. ..	18 508	47th Bn. ..	4 123
15th Bn. ..	19 348	48th Bn. ..	14 381
16th Bn. ..	15 517	12th M.G. Coy. —	14
4th M.G. Coy. ..	4 91		
4th L.T.M. Bty. ..	1 34		
	<hr/> 78 1,980		<hr/> 27 882
<i>2nd Australian Division.</i>			
5th Infantry Brigade.		6th Infantry Brigade.	
	OFF. O.R.		OFF. O.R.
17th Bn. ..	11 331	Bde. H.Q. ..	4 13
18th Bn. ..	11 347	21st Bn. ..	16 324
19th Bn. ..	12 354	22nd Bn. ..	16 422
20th Bn. ..	12 287	23rd Bn. ..	14 348
5th F. Coy. Eng. ..	5 29	24th Bn. ..	13 343
5th M.G. Coy. ..	3 39	6th F. Coy. Eng. ..	1 30
8th M.G. Coy. ..	3 25	6th M.G. Coy. ..	4 20
5th L.T.M. Bty. ..	1 18	6th L.T.M. Bty. ..	— 24
8th L.T.M. Bty. ..	2 21	15th L.T.M. Bty. ..	1 10
5th Fld. Amb. —	12	6th Fld. Amb. —	8
	<hr/> 60 1,463		<hr/> 69 1,542
7th Infantry Brigade.			
	OFF. O.R.		OFF. O.R.
25th Bn. ..	3 87		
26th Bn. ..	6 126		
27th Bn. ..	4 62		
28th Bn. ..	12 165		
7th F. Coy. Eng. ..	2 10		
7th L.T.M. Bty. —	15		
7th M.G. Coy. ..	2 5		
7th Fld. Amb. ..	1 31		
	<hr/> 30 501		
Artillery ..	4 53	2nd Div Sig. Coy. ..	1 8
Med. & Hvy. T.M. Btys. ..	1 21	2nd Pioneer Bn. ..	8 133
		22nd M.G. Coy. —	4

this loss had one direct and not unimportant effect. In conjunction with the subsequent losses at Messines, it killed the 6th Australian Division, then forming in England. Instead of being rested and built up after their not inconsiderable losses in the German retirement, three divisions were sucked into this battle, from which they emerged, not indeed as depleted as after Pozières, but weak enough to cause a drain upon their reservoirs in England.

Bullecourt, more than any other battle, shook the confidence of Australian soldiers in the capacity of the British command; the errors, especially on April 10th and 11th, were obvious to almost everyone. As at Pozières—to which Second Bullecourt, though less protracted, was most comparable—results strategically important were clutched for by impossible tactics. Improvement in weapons and in company organisation rendered success easier at Bullecourt than at Pozières; but never yet since their arrival in France had any of the Australian divisions been employed in large operations in which the ultimate objective was really attainable with the means used for attaining it. Such success as they had achieved had been won by troops persisting, through the sheer quality of their mettle, in the face of errors.

*1st Australian Division (brigades employed under command of 2nd Australian Division).*

1st Infantry Brigade.			2nd Infantry Brigade.			3rd Infantry Brigade.		
Bde.	H.Q.	OFF. O.R.	Bde.	H.Q.	OFF. O.R.	Bde.	H.Q.	OFF. O.R.
1st Bn.	..	13 305	5th Bn.	..	5 74	9th Bn.	..	1 160
2nd Bn.	..	10 186	6th Bn.	..	1 32	10th Bn.	..	7 175
3rd Bn.	..	4 309	7th Bn.	..	11	11th Bn.	..	8 268
4th Bn.	..	7 250	8th Bn.	..	123	12th Bn.	..	15 269
1st M.G. Coy.	1	16	2nd M.G. Coy.	1	3	3rd M.G. Coy.	4	29
1st L.T.M. Bty.	1	5	2nd L.T.M. Bty.	1	3	3rd L.T.M. Bty.	1	6
1st Fld. Amb.	—	3	2nd Fld. Amb.	—	19	3rd Fld. Amb.	—	7
		<u>36 1,076</u>			<u>8 265</u>			<u>36 920</u>

*5th Australian Division.*

14th Infantry Brigade.			15th Infantry Brigade.		
	OFF.	O.R.		OFF.	O.R.
53rd Bn.	..	3 113	57th Bn.	..	3 60
54th Bn.	..	5 278	58th Bn.	..	11 234
55th Bn.	..	2 61	59th Bn.	..	8 98
56th Bn.	..	3 111	60th Bn.	..	4 105
14th M.G. Coy.	—	24	15th M.G. Coy.	—	16
14th L.T.M. Bty.	—	11	15th L.T.M. Bty.	—	7
14th Fld. Amb.	—	17	15th Fld. Amb.	—	13
		<u>13 615</u>			<u>26 533</u>
5th Div. Sig. Coy.	—	1			
8th Fld. Amb.	—	16	5th Pioneer Bn.	—	39

The Second Bullecourt was the most brilliant of these achievements, impressing enemy and friends alike; it was, in some ways, the stoutest achievement of the Australian soldier in France, carried through against the stubbornest enemy that ever faced him there. Fortunately, it was the last such achievement. In the fighting still to come the conditions were sometimes terribly adverse; but never again did the chief difficulties throughout seem attributable to faults of the British command. When next the Australian infantry divisions entered battle they found their actions directed by higher leadership of a strikingly different order.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE FLANDERS PLAN. THE 3<sup>RD</sup> DIVISION

THE narrative must now return to the more labyrinthine courses of Allied statesmanship. Reference has already been made to the fact that on April 24th, when Nivelle visited Haig and tentatively arranged with him for a great joint offensive at St. Quentin and Havrincourt, the British leader was already aware that Nivelle was likely to be displaced by Pétain, and that this plan might come to nothing. But, in order to reassure Haig as to their intention of maintaining active effort, Painlevé and Ribot actually asked him to see them in Paris on April 26th, and at that interview asseverated that they agreed with his view as to the need of keeping up the pressure on the enemy. The French offensive provided for in the Chantilly plan would be continued, the French Premier said, no matter who might be in command of the French armies.

Haig was well satisfied by these assurances. But the British War Cabinet was deeply disturbed by a report from the British Embassy in Paris that Pétain's appointment might mean the abandonment of the French part in the offensive. The Ministers asked Haig to give them a definite opinion, adding that, since Great Britain was doing her full share as agreed upon, the Government desired to be sure that the French were doing theirs. Haig's reply set forth the assurance given to him by Ribot, but the War Cabinet was far from satisfied.

The news from France had arrived at a moment of tense anxiety. In spite of the Russian Government's manifesto of April 9th, foreshadowing the nation's continuance in the war, the Russian armies were reported to be fraternising with the Germans. At the same time the German submarine campaign against Great Britain had reached a critical stage: for the first time there seemed a serious possibility that it would achieve success by cutting off the supplies of the British nation. Sir William Robertson wrote to Haig:

The situation at sea is very bad indeed. It has never been so bad as at present.

In the third week of April no less than 55 British merchant ships—a total of 180,000 tons—had been sunk. In that month the loss of shipping available to Great Britain and the Allies amounted to 881,027 tons and, allowing for all new building and repairs of ships, it was estimated that by the end of 1917 less than 5,000,000 tons would be left—barely enough for feeding the British people, and far too few for the carriage of troops, munitions, and supplies necessary to maintain the Allies' effort.

At such a time relaxation of the effort on land was not to be thought of, and Robertson urged that this view should be strongly presented to the French Government. If the French could not be induced to continue their offensive, they should, as a last resort, be asked to relieve the British along part of the Western Front, and so furnish Haig with more troops for preparing his main offensive. The War Cabinet decided to visit Paris immediately, in order to ascertain by frank discussion what the true intentions of the French Government were.

Actually, although a strong body of French political opinion was disturbed by the result of Nivelle's offensive and nervous concerning its continuance, the feeling against Nivelle in the French Ministry was not yet strong enough to admit of his dismissal; nor was the Government then prepared to take a step which, following immediately on the Aisne offensive, would proclaim that battle to the world as a disaster, and so encourage the enemy. Pétain therefore was not yet made commander-in-chief; he was called to Paris on April 28th to become chief of the general staff. Ostensibly the French Government was merely strengthening its control of operations in the same manner as the British Government had done when Robertson was appointed Chief of the Imperial General Staff in London and Haig as Commander-in-Chief of the B.E.F.; and a powerful section of the French Ministry, supporting Nivelle, intended that this arrangement, modelled on the British, should be a permanent one.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The general staff in Paris had been completely overshadowed by that at G.Q.G., which, under Joffre, had practically undertaken the direction of the war. Ribot and Painlevé intended to resuscitate the influence of the Paris staff, incidentally increasing the control of the Government. The same problem, in various forms, naturally arose in most of the chief belligerent countries, the solution depending largely on the character of the leaders.

But the Minister of War had already decided that Pétain's appointment must be only a step towards Nivelle's removal. There was ample evidence that Nivelle was fast losing the respect of his subordinates; he had been browbeaten by Generals Mangin and Micheler who, in interviews which occasioned a scene described at G.Q.G. as "terrible,"<sup>2</sup> accused him of betraying them. Painlevé's decision was wise and inevitable. An opportunity for Nivelle's removal was not likely to be long delayed; Pétain and Nivelle could never work together as Haig and Robertson did. Whereas the two English leaders were in close general agreement as to the conduct of operations, it was common knowledge that Pétain and Nivelle stood for opposite principles. A clash of policy between them was certain—indeed one occurred immediately. Pétain objected to an important item (the attack on Brimont) in Nivelle's instructions for renewing the offensive on May 4th, and Nivelle was ordered by the Minister to meet Pétain and concert plans with him. He submitted, and a crisis in the command was for the moment avoided.

It was on May 3rd—the day of the great attack of which "Second Bullecourt" formed part—that the British Prime Minister crossed to France, taking with him Lord Robert Cecil, Sir William Robertson, Major-General Maurice,<sup>3</sup> and Lord Jellicoe. At the ensuing conference in Paris, Haig joined them, and the French were represented by Ribot, Painlevé, Bourgeois,<sup>4</sup> Pétain, and Admiral Lacaze. Nivelle also was present—it would have been most awkward for the French Government if he had been dismissed immediately before this meeting, inasmuch as, only a few months before, their predecessors had been urging the British Government to force

<sup>2</sup> *French Headquarters, 1915-1918*, by Jean de Pierrefeu, p. 157. The clearest of many explanations of these events is given in Painlevé's book, *Comment j'ai nommé Foch et Pétain*. From many sources, high and low, there were being received expressions of mistrust and disapproval of Nivelle's leadership. Nivelle himself was acutely aware that the army's confidence in him was waning, and he now offered his resignation. In conference with Painlevé it was decided that the time was unsuitable for this—it would give heart to the enemy; but Nivelle agreed to renew his offer of resignation whenever the Government should call on him to do so. The meanness and uncertainty of his manoeuvres in his effort to find a scapegoat for the army's distrust went far to rob Nivelle of such influence as he had retained with the French Cabinet. Military critics are mostly opposed to Painlevé, but few careful students can fail to appreciate the reasons given by him for his actions at this stage.

<sup>3</sup> Major-Gen. Sir Frederick Maurice, K.C.M.G., C.B., p.s.c. Director of Military Operations, War Office, 1915/18. Officer of British Regular Army, of London; b. Dublin, 19 Jan., 1871.

<sup>4</sup> Minister of Labour, and a supporter of Nivelle.



Haig, against his will, to conform to Nivelle's orders. But, though present, Nivelle had lost his influence, and was at that time endeavouring to maintain it by a measure which to British minds will always damn his claim to sympathy—the throwing-out of his own most tried and trustworthy assistant, Mangin.<sup>5</sup>

At the meeting on May 4th the effort of the British representatives was directed at putting heart into the French Government, and at obtaining from it a promise that vigorous action would continue. The British therefore took the lead both at the principal conference and at the separate meeting of the generals, who, under Robertson's presidency, drew up an agreement as to operations, to be carried on "relentlessly" and "with all available forces." At the main conference this agreement was adopted by both Governments, Lloyd George impressing on the French delegates the uselessness of continuing a British offensive if the French abandoned theirs. It is apparent, however, that he conceived some doubt as to the sincerity of the French Ministers' promises, since he thought it necessary to pin them down with a pledge that the French would attack on a great scale, and not merely with two or three divisions. These assurances were given.

Thus ostensibly the generals and Governments of both countries were of one mind. This apparent unanimity extended not only to the necessity of continuing to rain heavy blows on the enemy, but to a change of method by which those blows were to be delivered. For the first time the British leaders had the chance of exercising a decisive influence in determining the Allies' methods, and it happened that in Pétain they found a man who favoured tactics that also appealed strongly to Haig and Robertson. All were agreed<sup>6</sup> that grandiose enterprises aimed at immediately "breaking through the enemy's front and . . . at distant objectives" were now out of the question. Not only Nivelle's offensive, but all stages, except the first, of the British effort at Arras had proved too costly. The only successes at present attainable seemed to be those secured by minutely-prepared

<sup>5</sup> The reader may recall how in somewhat similar circumstances Joffre threw out Foch (see p. 6). Fortunately for the Allies, both Foch and Mangin eventually returned to command.

<sup>6</sup> Doubtless Nivelle also was sincerely of this opinion after his dearly-won experience.

offensives with limited objectives. But, with the artillery now available to the Allies, successes of that sort should be attainable almost whenever desired. At nearly every point where guns could be massed, the Germans could be thrust back for a mile or so; their artillery could be suppressed and held down while their battered infantry was being killed, ousted, or captured, and the position consolidated. Serious trouble seemed only to begin when the attacking infantry attempted to pass beyond the protection of their guns—then occurred heavy losses out of proportion to the value of the gains. Accordingly, advances were now to be limited to the ground that could be enclosed within an overwhelming artillery-barrage. The achievements would not be so spectacular as those previously aimed at, but they would be almost certain—it was merely a matter of good weather and sufficient resources.

If economy of life was carefully planned for, these attacks should furnish what those on the Somme had never furnished—a practical method of wearing-down the enemy. No opponent could indefinitely endure shocks like that of the first Arras-Vimy attack. If they could be repeated often and quickly, the enemy's power of resistance must become more and more exhausted and more extensive thrusts might then become possible. The basic principles of this method were agreed upon by the generals, written down by Robertson, and approved by the whole conference. "The time and place of the various attacks" were to be left for decision by the military commanders, but it was understood that the British would now deliver the main stroke, their long-planned blow in Flanders. As a blind, the Arras offensive would be maintained, but only so far as this could be done without interfering with the preparations in Flanders. The French would assist with offensives conducted, as Painlevé asseverated, "with all possible energy," but in accordance with these altered principles. The French leader would no longer have any control over the British, since Haig's subordination had only been arranged to continue during the carrying out of Nivelle's plan, which the new agreement stated to be "no longer operative." The dislike of British G.H.Q. for that arrangement had been greatly intensified by frequent reports that the French political leaders were interfering with Nivelle's conduct of operations, and even Lloyd George must have

realised that the recent unfortunate trial had set back the chance of introducing unified control. When Painlevé soon afterwards suggested that the power given to Nivelle should pass to his successor, Pétain, he met with no response.<sup>7</sup>

The British Government appeared for the moment to be satisfied that an effective agreement had been reached at this conference, which ostensibly reinstated, with modifications, the Chantilly policy. It has since become clear, however, that the agreement was only apparent. Doubtless all those sitting round this table in Paris were sincerely impressed with the need for maintaining a vigorous offensive, but nevertheless they differed widely as to the nature and objects of the operations. To Pétain—and Robertson was to a large extent in agreement with him—the project meant the employment of a new, restricted, but certain, method of wearing-down the enemy at the smallest cost to the attacking troops—"destroying the enemy's divisions," as the agreement says—and preventing the Germans from decisively attacking. Pétain did not in his heart believe that the Allies could decide the war by any offensive in 1917, but these methods would enable them to survive so that they might attack with American help in 1918.

To Haig the agreement meant something quite different—permission to prepare for the Flanders offensive. This was to be launched, indeed, along prudent lines, but with an aim which went far beyond the mere wearing-down of the enemy's strength by "destroying divisions." It was a definite part of the Flanders plan that it should lead eventually to breaking-through, and to the gaining of positions so important to the enemy that their capture might end the war by causing the German people to despair of winning it. Although, as is explained later in this chapter, the project had admittedly been suggested by the particular interests of Great Britain, the benefits that would follow its success would affect all the Allies sufficiently to justify its adoption at this juncture as their main policy. With a dozen hammer-blows, delivered in accordance with the new method, the attacker might reasonably expect to advance a dozen miles. In most parts

<sup>7</sup> When Painlevé pressed it again on Lloyd George and Lord Milner on August 6, the British Prime Minister informed him that, although he and Lord Milner absolutely agreed with the French view, Parliament, the Army, and the rest of the Government were against it.

of the front, however, so comparatively slight a loss of territory need not disturb the Germans, who, to economise life, might even fall back voluntarily and avoid the wearing-down battle. In many sectors, with their own borders 130 miles behind them, the only result of a few miles' retreat that need concern them would be the moral one. But north-east of Ypres a British advance of twelve or fifteen miles would so endanger the German garrisons on the Belgian coast that the enemy must either withdraw them or run a grave risk of seeing them cut off; and it was certain that the German leaders would not willingly give up the enormous moral and physical advantages of close access to the English Channel and Strait of Dover. It would mean for their opponents such an alleviation from vague fears and actual losses of shipping, and for the German people such an admission of defeat, that the attitude of the German commanders was certain: they must hold the Ypres front at all costs. However terrible the strain on their troops, they could not avoid it by another manœuvre such as had ultimately been forced on them at the Somme.

Here, therefore, was an area in which, if the Allies could advance by the power of their artillery, the German must stand up to them and maintain his defending troops beneath their successive blows. The British might advance only a mile at a time; but, if they advanced twelve or fifteen times, the strategic threat would render the position of the Germans precarious even if their power of resistance had not then broken down.<sup>8</sup> Haig never swerved from the belief that the Germans, already strained on the Somme, were now being severely tested by the Allied offensive, and that, if relaxation were denied them, victory would be won by reaching the limit of their endurance. He hoped that after the struggle in Flanders had continued for a few weeks demoralisation would

<sup>8</sup> A most interesting statement of the case for the Flanders campaign is contained in a G.H.Q. appreciation drafted five days after Haig's agreement with Nivelle to attack near Havrincourt—presumably incidental to a consideration of the steps to be taken if Nivelle was unable to continue his offensive as promised. The writer summarised his argument as follows: there was now no chance of inflicting decisive defeat this year on the Western Front. To pierce the German line so as to take full advantage of the breach was very difficult; but to drive the enemy back a few miles could be made a matter of almost mathematical certainty. The war was likely—from political and economic causes—to end in 1917. Therefore the British should attack between Lille and the sea—the only sector in which a few miles advance would have far-reaching effects—and drive the Germans from the coast. This, it was argued, was the most that could be done in the time.

set in; the steps in the battle, at first cautious and limited, might become longer and swifter, and the strained cord might then be struck with the object of breaking through. He envisaged, in short, a return to the principles of the Somme offensive, a combination of "wearing-down" and "breaking-through" tactics, but with improved methods for the former and a more definite strategic aim for the latter. When the other generals at the conference agreed that "it is now a question of wearing down and exhausting the enemy's resistance" it was surely his insistence which caused them to add: "and, if and when this is achieved, to exploit it to the fullest extent possible."

Lloyd George's enthusiasm for Nivelle had been deflated by the sudden crash of that general's scheme; and, impressed by the Admiralty's desire to clear the coast, he was—for the moment at least—won over to Haig's plan and vigorously maintained this development of the Chantilly policy. But in doing so he consistently laid down the condition, which indeed was an essential of the Chantilly plan, that the French must put their whole strength into the offensive. Robertson was fully alive to this point. Moreover he did not share Haig's optimism as to the possibility of securing in 1917 strategic results through a break-down of German morale.

It is not to be supposed that those who took part in the conference were fully conscious of these divergences of view, but subsequent events and writings make it appear certain that they existed. For good or ill within a few months their results were written indelibly across France and Belgium with the blood of Australian as well as other troops.<sup>9</sup>

British action on the lines of the new plan began at once. On May 7th Haig instructed his army commanders in conference at Doullens. Three days later specialist companies of the Royal Engineers and first instalments of artillery began to move from the Arras battlefield to the Second Army. The

**Plan of attack  
in Flanders**

<sup>9</sup> The French historian, General Palat (*Vol. XII, p. 265*), states that in giving false assurances the French Ministers "exhibited a defect of character which touches on duplicity." It would perhaps be fairer to say that there still remained a wide difference between the British and French Ministers' ideas of the effort necessary to constitute a "vigorous maintenance" of the offensive.

two divisions which had actually been withdrawn from control of the Second Army for the possible offensive at Havrincourt were given back to it; the staff, however, continued the consideration of plans for a Havrincourt attack, so as to have them ready for possible use in some future contingency.

The notion of an attack in Flanders had attracted British leaders at various times since the days when Winston Churchill decided to fling the naval brigades into Antwerp. The danger of the Germans penetrating farther towards the Strait of Dover, or even permanently holding the part of the Belgian coast already occupied by them, naturally caused even the most detached of Englishmen to regard the freeing of that coast as an important war aim. Churchill had urged combined action with the fleet; but the French leaders—partly, no doubt, through apprehension that the British might act independently in pursuit of this sectional aim—ensured that the flank of the Allied line resting on the coast should be held by a French army corps. They thus prevented any combination between the British Army and fleet except by agreement with themselves. In 1917, on the renewal of the “unrestricted” submarine campaign, the Germans maintained at Zeebrugge and Ostend a flotilla of small submarines which constituted a perpetual menace to the vital sea-transport across the Strait of Dover. The Admiralty now even said that, if the Army could not capture these bases, the Navy could not safeguard the seas.<sup>10</sup>



Independently of these considerations concerning the coast, there had been designed at an earlier stage of the war one important inland operation in Flanders. This was the capture of the Messines-Wytschaete ridge, the intruding height from which the Germans looked down on the Second Army's line south of Ypres. This project, in preparation for which the extensive undermining of the German front line had been begun in 1915, had originally been put forward by General

<sup>10</sup> See *The Fifth Army*, by Gen. Sir Hubert Gough, p. 189.

Plumer,<sup>11</sup> commanding the Second Army, as worth undertaking for its own sake. Haig, on becoming Commander-in-Chief, pointed out that this action could not of itself lead to a decision, and asked Plumer to consider it in association with the much more important project of breaking-through towards Ghent or Lille. Plumer, holding that the Rivers Scheldt and Lys would render a break-through impossible, did not favour this suggestion. G.H.Q., however, maintained that a British thrust past Roulers and Thourout, which would not involve the crossing of these rivers, would squeeze the Germans against the Dutch border and force them to leave the coast.

This was the plan which Haig adopted.<sup>12</sup> For his purpose, it might not be necessary to venture into the worst of the lowlands, practically impassable country if the German resistance retained its present toughness. Athwart the border between France and Belgium ran a chain of hills, strongly marked in the south but ending twenty miles north in long spurs that barely rose above the plain. The flats were almost entirely farm lands, but on the hills there had been built here and there the houses of well-to-do business men or land-owners, with surrounding woods which, in the Ypres salient, had been reduced to gaunt stubble, but elsewhere still screened parts of the ridges with foliage.

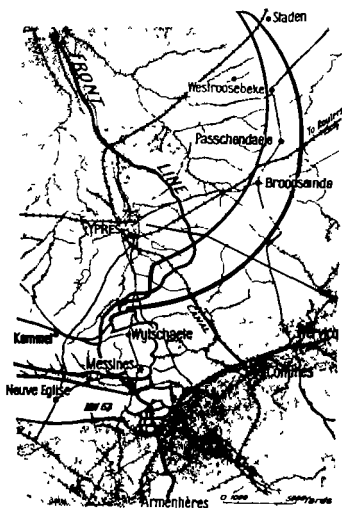
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<sup>11</sup> In answer to a request from Sir John French to state which was "the greatest strategical and tactical objective on the Second Army front," Plumer indicated the Messines-Wytschaete ridge, but added that its capture could not be attempted before the spring of 1916. Several of the necessary mines had already been begun. French ordered him to go ahead with his preparations to attack in the spring; the mines were to be ready in March.

<sup>12</sup> Under the original G.H.Q. plan the operations would be divided into six stages, the sixth of which would include the capture of Messines. Haig in March 1916 gave general approval to this plan, noting, against the proposal for its first phase, in the draft presented to him: "Yes, but this should be combined with attacks on Messines, etc." The matter was not then urgent, and the suggested attack on Messines was therefore, for the time being, merely held in view as a practicable side-stroke to the offensive on the Somme. The date provisionally mentioned for it was "about July 15th." Early in July 1916 the several corps selected by Plumer for the attack—one of them the I Anzac—took position on their proper fronts and began their preparations. How the Somme battle absorbed them has been told in the preceding volume of this work (*Vol. III, pp. 325-6*).

Later in 1916 the Admiralty, foreseeing the resumption of the submarine campaign, decided that the recapture of the coast in Flanders was advisable for reasons of naval policy; and, since every educated Briton had been trained from early boyhood to regard the naval interests of Great Britain as paramount, the consciousness of the Admiralty's desire for this step carried perhaps more real weight at G.H.Q. than even the wish of the Government would have done. Winston Churchill maintains (in *The World Crisis, 1916-1918*) that the naval considerations were not vital and were over stressed by the Admiralty. Probably this was so; in any case their influence was that of a religion. Haig steadily insisted on the inclusion of the Flanders attack in the Allies' plans of campaign. The British Government, by letter from Sir William Robertson, presented the project for incorporation in the Chantilly plan (15 Nov., 1916), and Joffre, and subsequently Nivelle, accepted it as the second move for 1917. From the moment when Nivelle's plan broke down, it became, as we have seen, the main operation.

This famous chain of heights, which furnishes the scene of most of the events remaining to be related in this volume, may be likened to a representation in bas-relief of a sickle, held upright by a man's two hands, its sharp edge facing him. The likeness holds fairly good as regards not only the direction but the prominence of the hills. The two forearms, extending one above the other seven miles south of Ypres, represent the chains of (1) Mont Noir—Mont Rouge—Scherpenberg—Kemmel, with the hand at Wytschaete, and (2) Bailleul—Ravelsberg—Neuve Église—Hill 63, with the hand at St. Yves. The handle runs from St. Yves through Messines to Wytschaete. On the lowland immediately north of the handle lies Ypres, and the blade is represented by the



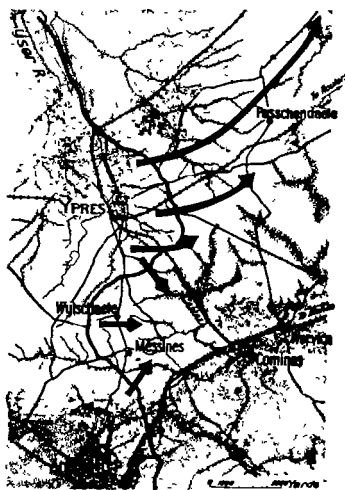
ridge that curves away east and north-east of that city, in a wide semicircle from whose heights German artillery observers had for over two years looked down upon the British lines on the flats. The whole blade and the most prominent part of the handle—Wytschaete and Messines—were in German possession; but, where grasped by the lower hand, the handle was occupied by the British, who also from the end of the lower forearm, Hill 63, looked across the valley of the little River Douve at the Messines hill a mile distant. It was the German salient at Messines that formed the southern re-entrant of the British salient at Ypres, but, as the German back area was hidden from view and that of the British mostly exposed, there was no comparison between the comfort of the two salients.

No British commander could attempt to capture the blade of the sickle leaving the Germans in possession of the handle (Messines—Wytschaete) behind his southern flank. Haig's plan, therefore, was to seize the handle either before or as part of the first stage of the advance from Ypres against the



blade. With the blade—Broodseinde, Passchendaele, and Westroosebeke—won, attacks would be launched down the eastern slope towards Roulers and Thourout. If those places, only 11 and 16 miles respectively from the present front, were attained, the Germans must at least seriously consider withdrawal from the coast, especially as additional pressure would be brought to bear on them, during this second stage, by an attack along the coast combined with the landing of a division from the sea. But this coastal enterprise would be purely subsidiary. The main project was not dependent on such experiments. In contrast to the plan of the Somme offensive of 1916, it aimed at ends known to be attainable; and, so long as the power of the artillery, and not the moral break-down of the enemy, was to be relied on, it aimed at them by methods by which such ends had previously been attained.<sup>13</sup>

Notwithstanding Nivelle's attitude towards the project, consideration of the plans and preparation for the offensive—so far as the Second Army's resources allowed—had continued steadily during all the months of his régime. It was decided that the tasks on the Second Army's front were so distinct as each to necessitate the attention of a separate army commander and staff; the "southern operation" (the



Three southern arrows. southern operation. Three northern arrows: northern operation.

<sup>13</sup> As a sequel to the Chantilly conference in 1916 the French staff had assisted by independently studying the Flanders problem, and had drawn up a tentative scheme which, as General Kiggell pointed out at a conference between the War Office and Admiralty, was strikingly similar to that of G.H.Q. Both plans envisaged a main attack by some 20 British divisions and by the Belgian Army on their left, assisted, when the advance had gone sufficiently deep, by the landing of a British force on the Belgian coast combined with a thrust by the XXXVI French Corps along the foreshore. The main difference between the French and British plans was that the French estimated less highly than the British the difficulties of landing. The French held that a landing would be feasible when once the main attack from Ypres had achieved partial success. The British, on the other hand, thought it should not be attempted until the main thrust had reached Passchendaele. The French suggested that 5 divisions should be thrown ashore; the British, however, could provide at the most only 2.

attack by some 12 divisions against Messines Ridge) would be carried out by Plumer; but one of the Somme generals—either Rawlinson or Gough—would be placed in charge of the main “northern operation” (the attack by about 16 divisions from Ypres towards Roulers). The Belgian Army—with a British “chief-of-staff,” if the Belgians would agree to this—would be asked to attack north of the Forest of Houthulst, a patch of thick woodland two miles deep which furnished one of the chief tactical obstacles to the plan; and either the French XXXVI Corps, or—if the French would permit the relief of that corps—a British army corps, would, at the proper time, attack along the foreshore from Nieuport in co-operation with a British landing south of Ostend.

Important changes occurred during the development of the plans. The experience of the spring campaigns, and the conference on May 4th, caused Haig to lean more decisively than hitherto to purely “limited” methods.<sup>14</sup> As the British were now shouldering the main task, the French leaders undertook to set free more British divisions by taking over the Fourth Army’s front as far as Havrincourt.<sup>15</sup> They also, later, agreed to give to the British the sector of the XXXVI French Army Corps on the coast, and at their request a small French army, instead of a Belgian one, operated on the left of the main British thrust. The Nieuport sector was taken over by the XV British Corps on June 20th, and it was thither that Haig sent Rawlinson, to whom he had at one time intended to entrust the main, or “northern,” operation.<sup>16</sup> Command of this was now given to Gough. Only the “southern” attack, on the Messines Ridge, would be conducted by Plumer. Early in May it was decided for several reasons—the most important being the urgent need for quickly assisting the French—to deliver the southern attack first.

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<sup>14</sup> This was partly because in the earlier plans it had been assumed that, before the British struck at Ypres, the French and British offensives elsewhere would have drawn away the German reserves. In some of the earlier notes from G.H.Q. to Second Army, on 6 and 15 Jan., 1917, stress had been laid on the importance of breaking through quickly so as to reach open country before the Germans could bring up reserves. It is possible that Haig may have been at that stage impressed by certain features of Nivelle’s method. By May it was obvious that French action would not consume the German reserves to the extent previously expected.

<sup>15</sup> Subsequent events made it impossible for the French to take over more than the six miles south of the River Omignon.

<sup>16</sup> Haig attached much weight, says Brigadier-General Charteris (*Field Marshal Earl Haig*, p. 268), to the selection of the army commander most suitable for each operation. Rawlinson was naturally disappointed, but was consoled on learning that he would eventually have charge of the whole coastal force.

Although Sir Herbert Plumer would now have charge merely of the lesser half of the offensive to be launched from his previous sector, he was, until after the Messines offensive, responsible for the preparations for both attacks. It has been seen that some preparation, such as mining, had begun early in 1916. As the Messines offensive was not launched until June 1917, probably never, since the first movements of the war, were any British operations so carefully prepared. Both Plumer—as his white hair and patriarchal demeanour suggested—and his chief-of-staff, Major-General Harington,<sup>17</sup> who was known to Australian leaders as a careful, helpful friend, were by nature prone to prudent measures; and the scheme of the Messines attack was elaborated at conference after conference and in order after order. The consideration devoted to it was necessarily increased by variations of high policy on the part of G.H.Q., since at one time the attack had to be envisaged as a possible fore-stroke to larger operations, at other times as an after-stroke.<sup>18</sup>

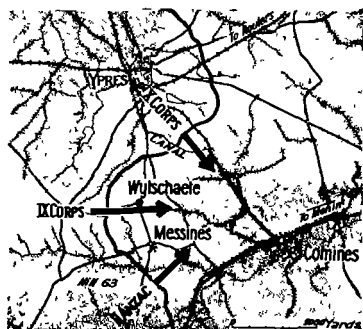
Plumer's and Harington's original scheme undoubtedly erred on the side of over-caution. The Messines attack was to be spread over several days, the German salient being first assaulted from north and south; the southern attack would not reach Messines village until the second day, and this would merely be preliminary to the "squeezing out" of the Germans from the centre of the salient, at Wytschaete. As had happened before in Haig's dealings with his army commanders, it was he who (on April 3rd) insisted on a bolder conception, and, in spite of Plumer's doubts, indicated his wish that the whole Messines-Wytschaete Ridge should be captured on the first day, before the Germans had time to recover from the initial stroke. At a later stage he further insisted that the immediate advance should not end at the ridge, but proceed deeply enough to capture a considerable part of the enemy's guns.

It is not too much to say that these directions changed the whole nature of the operations, but it is fair to add that it was probably only the increase of the available artillery

<sup>17</sup> Major-General Harington succeeded Major-General H. B. Williams, under whom the preparations had been begun, in June 1916.

<sup>18</sup> Plumer was warned that, if Nivelle's offensive succeeded, the Second Army might be called on at short notice to strike with a comparatively small force, and alternative plans had to be made against this contingency.

that rendered the altered scheme practicable. The final plan provided for the capture of the whole Messines-Wytschaete Ridge and its eastern slope in one day by a concentric stroke made by three army corps each of four divisions, with a fourth corps of four divisions in reserve. The northern corps would strike south-eastwards on both sides of the Ypres-Comines canal; the central corps due eastwards through and past Wytschaete; the southern corps east and north-east from Hill 63 and Ploegsteert through Messines. The southern army corps was II Anzac.



The II Anzac Corps since its arrival in France a year before (when it relieved I Anzac in the Armentières sector and was immediately involved in the Battle of Fromelles) had remained the southern corps of the Second Army. After the 5th Australian Division left it for the Somme winter campaign and the 3rd Australian Division came over from England, the corps had consisted of the New Zealand Division (Major-General Sir Andrew Russell), the 3rd Australian Division (Major-General John Monash), and one British division. At one time this was the 34th, but, when the corps eventually "side-slipped" a few miles northward to bring it on to its proper battle-front, it embraced instead the 25th Division, which for some time had been serving upon that front. In the plan for II Anzac's part in the Messines-Wytschaete attack the New Zealand Division would take Messines; north of it the 25th would strike between Messines and Wytschaete; south of it the 3rd Australian Division would capture the southern shoulder of Messines Ridge and form the southernmost of the nine attacking divisions of the Second Army. As reserve for II Anzac, a fourth division would be provided.

The 3rd Australian Division, which thus—except for the 1st Tunnelling Company at Hill 60—would furnish the only Australian force in the first phase of the Messines attack, was still the baby of the A.I.F., untried so far as major operations went. The four veteran divisions down in the Somme region had never yet seen it. Unlike the 4th and 5th, which had been forged out of half-veteran material in the dust and sweat of Egypt and then flung into battle like a learner of swimming thrown into deep water, the 3rd had been raised in Australia, carefully trained for six months at Salisbury Plain, and then sent for “acclimatisation” to the quietest corner of the British front. General Birdwood always felt that the Australian Government, having itself organised this division, must take a special interest in it. And—just as the embryo 4th and 5th Divisions, which he had originally named the “3rd” and “4th,” had to cede those names because the prospective division in Australia had been named the 3rd—so, in at least one other crisis in the history of the A.I.F., the older divisions had to give way to the 3rd through Birdwood’s loyal determination to give effect to what he believed to be the wishes of the Australian Government.

During the time when the older divisions were going through the shattering experiences of Pozières, and the miseries of the early winter at Flers, they often sardonically listened to reports of the 3rd being paraded before the King on Salisbury Plain, of its proficiency in exercises, of its excellent appearance and freedom from crime; and, partly through a subconscious—and not altogether justified—feeling that this newcomer was the darling of the Defence Department, but chiefly through a half-humorous but very definite grievance at the lateness of its “entry into the war,” they nicknamed its men “the neutrals,” the “Lark Hill Lancers,” or most generally (from its oval shoulder-patches) the “Eggs-a-cook.”<sup>19</sup> When it eventually arrived in its sheltered sector they regarded it much as the rougher boys at a state school might look upon an immaculate, tenderly brought-up little cousin at a neighbouring dame’s school.

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<sup>19</sup> The cry of the Egyptian street sellers of boiled eggs.

There is no question as to the depth of these feelings, and they were founded on something more than mere jealousy. The 3rd Division was different. Long before, when the 2nd Division was forming for Gallipoli, there went round a reported statement that its members had volunteered in no spirit of adventure (the "adventurers" having rushed to the 1st Division), but from sober determination to see the war through. This sobriety was much more visible in the 3rd Division, and was encouraged by the nature and methods of its commander. Major-General Monash was the last man to use, or permit the use of, rough and ready methods of training or of treatment. His Jewish blood gave him an outstanding capacity for tirelessly careful organisation. When he called, or was called to, a conference, he prepared beforehand a list of questions covering the whole field of the subject discussed, and numbered, perhaps, from 1 to 100. This list he personally compiled, and he had it circulated to his staff officers concerned; before the conference ended, every item on it must be dealt with and duly ticked off. Questions that others might consider trifling would be included—as to the movements of the Y.M.C.A. representative and his coffee stall, the provision of a cinema show, or of a special system of inspection of the cooking arrangements.<sup>20</sup> Not that Monash surpassed other divisional leaders in thought or sympathy for his troops, but he knew the value of these measures in producing efficiency; he was himself prepared to go to any extreme of mental or bodily effort in order to achieve it, and he insisted that his subordinates must do the same. His maxim was that the staff must be the servant of the troops:

Harington's doctrine, that all staffs exist to help units and not to make difficulties for them, is the only one (he wrote on April 11) that can lead to success, and I am constantly preaching that doctrine myself.

Subjected from its babyhood to this sort of care, the 3rd Division, like a much-handled colt, was to a marked extent tamed and tractable. In division, brigades, and battalions the staff- and office-work were well and carefully done; officers and N.C.O.'s took special care of their men; crime

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<sup>20</sup> It was while guiding an expert on such an inspection that Lieutenant P. F. E. Schuler (Hawthorn, Vic.), formerly a war correspondent in Gallipoli, was killed by a chance salvo. Schuler had then joined the A.A.S.C. and had won much credit for his gallantry in the Battle of Messines.

was said to be less by two-thirds than in some of the sister formations. The division was conscious and proud of these qualities, and Monash studiously endeavoured to increase its self-pride by publishing to it any eulogistic references made by the press to its achievements. He also insisted that, as a mark of distinction, the troops should wear their hat-brims flat, and not looped as in the rest of the A.I.F.

In spite of a few elements which some old soldiers criticised as "eye-wash"<sup>21</sup> in the final exercises of the 3rd Division, it was undoubtedly a particularly sound and well-disciplined body which General Monash took in November 1916 to France, and which entered, perhaps more seriously than other Australian divisions, into the observances and routine of trench life at Armentières. The old divisions on the Somme, despite their supercilious attitude, were burning with curiosity to know what the new division was like, and the new division, though outwardly indifferent, could hardly conceal its anxiety to show them. Its most cherished desire was to be just one of the five, and, if General Monash had known how his order as to hat-brims burned in the men's hearts, the brims would possibly have been looped up that same hour. While in the Armentières sector, however, the new division remained almost as separate as on Salisbury Plain.

It had occupied at first the line immediately south of the Lys. Being composed in the same manner as most Australian infantry divisions, it comprised one brigade (the 9th) of New South Wales troops, one (10th) mainly of Victorians, and one (11th) from the "outer" States, and differed only from the normal in that the Victorian brigade included a Tasmanian battalion (the 40th), and that the "outer" States' brigade contained two battalions of Queenslanders instead of one. The 9th and 10th Brigades had entered the line first,<sup>22</sup> the 11th Brigade relieving the 9th three weeks later. Their first experience of action was a German raid in the early morning of December 9th against the 38th Battalion.<sup>23</sup> Their

<sup>21</sup> Practices carried out for show rather than for real use

<sup>22</sup> The 9th Brigade began to enter the front trenches on Nov. 27, and the 10th, farther north, next to the Lys, on Dec. 1. The 11th Brigade began to come in on Dec. 22

<sup>23</sup> Covered by trench-mortar and machine-gun fire, two parties of Germans, about thirty men in all, attempted to enter the 38th's trench near "Oxford Street," but were repulsed largely through the gallantry of a Lewis gunner, Private J. J. Meyerink (Haarlem, Holland, and Sea Lake, Vic.). Meyerink was killed in action on 13 Oct., 1917

first minor offensive was a raid by the 33rd (N.S.W.) Battalion beside the Armentières-Lille railway on Christmas eve, 1916. The German trenches were found deserted, and were raided again on the following night, but with the same result.

The absence of Germans in the raided trenches was probably due to a marked change that had come over the methods of warfare in the Armentières sector. During the first month of the 3rd Division's active service, the Germans applied there, as elsewhere, the newly-enforced principle of holding the front "in depth."<sup>24</sup> Their front-line trench now became merely the site for a series of fairly widely separated outposts, with small supporting bodies in intermediate positions several hundred yards in rear, and main supports farther back in the second-line system. Somewhat similar methods had been enjoined by the British command in the Armentières sector about the time when the I Anzac Corps first held it, but the supposedly essential preparatory work had consumed so much time that the system had not even yet been fully developed.<sup>25</sup>

In November 1916, however, intelligence, gained in raids, indicated that the Germans considered attack in this area impracticable for either side. The allotment of three divisions for its defence, therefore, involved serious waste of strength, and Haig, in his general scheme of winter operations, laid down that preparations must be made to hold it with one. A scheme on the lines approved by I Anzac over six months before<sup>26</sup> was now carried out, positions for outposts being chosen along every 200 or 300 yards of the front line, and the unoccupied spaces between them protected with additional entanglement, and—in case the Germans entered there—left open to fire from the rear. It was to the obvious advantage of each side to keep up the appearance of occupying the whole line, so that its opponents could not detect which part was garrisoned and where were the gaps; but in practice neither side could obtain sufficient labour to maintain the unoccupied

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<sup>24</sup> See p. 411

<sup>25</sup> For this delay the I Anzac leaders share the responsibility (see Vol. III, pp. 188-9). The preparations included a system of deep dugouts still being tunnelled in the clay by the 2nd Australian Tunnelling Company.

<sup>26</sup> See Vol. III, pp. 188-9.



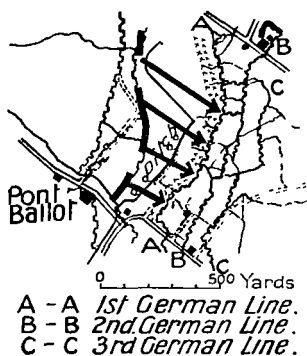
trenches in repair. The deserted works in the "gaps" gradually fell into a ruin of slimy sandbags, held up by rotting V-frames, and, in places, one or two feet deep in stagnant water. Through these tumble-down ruins patrols passed at intervals from one fortified outpost to the next. But as the intervening breastworks gradually fell in, such patrols found themselves at some points exposed to fire, and could only move safely at night.

Thus, instead of the rigid trench lines from which for over two years the opposing garrisons had faced each other as from two parallel walls, both sides had now adopted a more open system, which, incidentally, furnished a better training for their troops. The German line was probably still held the more lightly—the troops invented a fable of a wooden-legged "caretaker" over there, who fired flares at different points by pulling a string. But it was at times possible for patrols of either side actually to enter and move for some distance along parts of the opposing trenches, or even to wander in the open behind them without meeting a soul.

These games the troops of the 3rd Australian Division played every whit as boldly as those of the older divisions, and in raiding they soon came to be the most experienced. Haig's policy during the winter of 1916—to keep all possible strain on the Germans by constant activity—applied in the Second Army as well as on the Somme, and, as the conditions in the north were more favourable to raiding, the activity there constantly took that form. Haig's order suggested that these minor attacks might have to be made in greater force, and to strike deeper than in the past. Accordingly the Second Army divisions included in their raiding programmes one or more enterprises by whole battalions on fronts extending to half-a-mile, with orders to occupy for an hour or so the enemy's front and support lines. To assist these enterprises the Second Army organised a mobile group of heavy artillery (known to the troops as the "Travelling Circus"), which would spend a week or more in each sector visited; and the local division, where possible, timed an important raid so as to take advantage of its presence. On February 21st two big raids were made by the New Zealand and 47th Divisions respectively, the former at Bois Grenier, the latter at The

Bluff, south-east of Ypres. The 47th took 104 prisoners at the cost of 80 casualties; the New Zealanders<sup>27</sup> brought back 44 at a cost of 100 casualties.

In the 3rd Australian Division each brigade undertook a programme of smaller raids<sup>28</sup> working up to a final large raid about March. Its first big raid, that of the 10th Brigade, took place at Houplines on February 27th, being carried out by a composite battalion of 20 officers and 804 others, under Lieutenant-Colonel Davis<sup>29</sup> of the 38th. This force, carefully organised and minutely trained, seized and occupied for thirty-five minutes the line of the 23rd Bavarian I.R. on an 800 yards' front, penetrating in most parts to the second and third trenches, 200 yards in rear, and capturing 17 Germans, a machine-gun, and other material. In his preparations for the raid, General Monash used methods of which more will be heard later, combining smoke- and gas-shell in the preparatory bombardments in such a way that the Germans might



<sup>27</sup> Their raiding force comprised 16 officers and 500 men.

<sup>28</sup> December—

24. 33rd Battalion entered the German line, but found no enemy.

25. 33rd Battalion again entered the enemy line, but the enemy had fled.

January—

9. 39th Battalion entered the German line and killed a few men of 23rd Bav. I.R.

10. 44th Battalion (30 under Captain C. L. Biles, of Claremont, W. Aust.) entered the German line, but found the enemy withdrawn.

13. 40th Battalion raided at "Hobbs's Farm," but found the German wire unbroken.

28. 10th Brigade (8 officers and 216 of all battalions) raided at Houplines. One party reached the third German trench after sharp fighting, and secured a prisoner; two parties failed.

31. Raid by 11th Brigade failed, entry being prevented by machine-gun fire.

February—

12. Raid by 40th Battalion failed, meeting wire and being bombed Lieutenant W. J. Culton (Rupanyup district, Vic.) killed.

18. 36th Battalion: a fighting patrol under Lieutenant C. W. Boddy (of Melbourne and Sydney) blew up a German machine-gun.

20. 43rd Battalion raided the "Railway Salient," but was met by a German barrage in No-Man's Land, and failed, suffering 30 casualties.

22. 39th Battalion entered the German front-line at La Houssoie, but found it empty and ruined.

24. 33rd Battalion (4 officers, 78 others) entered the German front-line at Pont Ballot and captured an officer and 3 men, but killed them on the way back. The 33rd suffered 29 casualties.

<sup>29</sup> Col C. H. Davis, C.B.E., D.S.O., V.D. Commanded 38th Bn., 1916/18. Barrister and solicitor; of Bendigo, Vic.; b. Kilmore, Vic., 4 June, 1872. Died 11 Jan., 1923.

tend to believe that gas was present whenever they were surrounded with smoke. Thus, although in the final bombardment smoke would be used *without gas*, the Germans might rush for their gas-masks, the wearing of which would hamper them when the attack caught them.<sup>30</sup> It was reported that on this occasion a few Germans were found in their gas-masks.

This raid, the most important ever undertaken by Australians,<sup>31</sup> was to be followed on March 13th by the big raid of the 11th Brigade, for which the travelling group of heavy artillery arriving on March 8th would be available.<sup>32</sup> During four days prior to the 13th, however, rain fell incessantly. No-Man's land at Grande Porte Égal Farm

<sup>30</sup> It had been intended on this occasion to use gas also shortly before the attack, but the wind was unfavourable.

<sup>31</sup> A vivid narrative of the "Big Raid" (as it was always known in the 3rd Division) was written by Lieutenant C. H. Peters (Melbourne) of the 38th, who took part. The raiding battalion was composed of two companies from the 37th Battalion under Captains W. F. Robertson (Albert Park, Vic.) and W. J. Symons (Brunswick, Vic.), and two of the 38th under Captains J. Akeroyd (Bairnsdale and South Yarra, Vic.) and F. E. Fairweather (Rockhampton, Q'land, and Heidelberg, Vic.). The preliminary bombardment took place about three hours before, at 9.40 p.m. The German artillery at once replied to it. The disturbance died down, and it was hoped that the Germans would imagine that all danger was over. At 12.30 the barrage fell again on the German front line, and by the light of flares the 800 men could be seen advancing at a run across No-Man's Land on a front of half-a-mile. Guiding tapes had been excellently placed by scouts under Lieutenant J. C. Todd (Newmarket, Vic.) of the 37th. A wide ditch was met, but it had already been measured and was now bridged. Part of the wire when reached was found to have been repaired since the bombardment had broken it, but, to make a pathway, the raiders laid a straw mat over it, and another beyond that, while the men beside them hacked another pathway with wire-cutters. After this belt had been passed, they came on the borrow-ditch which also, in one part, was full of uncut wire; but even at that point someone found an opening made for German patrols, and except on the left the raiders quickly entered the German trench.

The artillery was now protecting the raiders by forming a box-barrage round the raided area; so accurate was this barrage that one of them afterwards said he "could have toasted bread against it." A few Germans fought pluckily, but most of them ran to the rear or surrendered. Of Robertson's company, on the right, the second platoon went on to the second trench, and the third to the third trench. All three positions had been completely smashed by the bombardment. Akeroyd's company also found each line smashed, and many dead Germans. Fairweather's was fired on by a machine-gun, but later found both this and a *granatenwerfer* abandoned.

The hardest task was that of Symons's company, on the left. On its front the gap cut in the German wire was found to be covered by the fire of two machine-guns placed some distance behind the German front, and therefore undisturbed by the bombardment. The wire and bridging party suffered heavy casualties, and Captain Symons (who, in the 7th Battalion, had won the Victoria Cross at Lone Pine), going forward to remedy the blockage, was wounded. But Lieutenant J. W. McDonald (Kilmore, Vic.) and Sergeant C. J. Taylor (Glenroy, Vic.) persisted in the effort, found other passages through the wire farther north, and led some 15 men into the trench, where they managed to get touch with Fairweather's company.

At 1.10 the withdrawal began, and was complete within half-an-hour. The casualties were 5 officers and 131 men, of whom 18 were left in the German lines. Among the captures were : searchlight and a new German *minenwerfer* fuse.

<sup>32</sup> This consisted only of three batteries of 6-inch howitzers, one battery of 60-pounders, and one of 4.7-in guns with strictly limited ammunition. The 2nd (Army) Brigade of New Zealand Field Artillery was also made available.

became so water-logged that Captain Lamb<sup>33</sup> of the 44th, in command of the raiding force, recommended that the operation should be postponed. As, however, the travelling artillery had almost immediately to move to another sector, this suggestion was rejected. The raid took place with rather disastrous result, the German trench being hardly entered,<sup>34</sup> and Lieutenant Taylor<sup>35</sup> and 19 other Australians being killed and 45 wounded. All night long officers and men, including Captain Lamb and Lieutenant Lintott,<sup>36</sup> toiled to bring in the wounded, and only one<sup>37</sup> was left in the German lines.

The third big raid, that by the 9th Brigade, never took place, the programme being interrupted on March 15th by a complete change of policy.

It was at this juncture that the German withdrawal on the Somme caused the British commanders to be apprehensive of a German counter-stroke in Flanders.

**The move  
to Messines**

The garrison in the Armentières area had by then been greatly reduced,<sup>38</sup> and, by order from General Plumer, II Anzac stopped raiding and concentrated on works of defence. At the same time the prospect of the offensive was brought very close by the issue on March 18th of the Second Army's plan for the capture of Messines. This was explained the same day by General Godley to his divisional commanders, whose staffs were ordered at once to concentrate upon the plans. By April 27th the three attack-divisions of II Anzac were concentrated upon

<sup>33</sup> Col. C. H. Lamb, M.C.; 44th Bn. Public accountant and auditor; of Perth, W. Aust.; b. Dunedin, N.Z., 19 Sept., 1882.

<sup>34</sup> The force, 6 officers and 400 men, assembled in No-Man's Land in spite of a German searchlight playing on the area, and at midnight, when the barrage fell, the troops advanced. Progress was difficult in the mud, and the borrow-pit in front of the German breastwork was so deep in water that part of the troops had to move through it holding their Lewis guns and rifles above their heads. Though bombed by the Germans, that particular party and one other entered the German trench. But the bulk of the force was still struggling in the wire and the mud, and, seeing that all arrangements had broken down and confusion must ensue, Lieutenant Taylor, commanding the assault, came to the bitter decision to order the troops back. Many questioned this command, and it was only on being told "It's Sammy Taylor's order" that they obeyed. Taylor, a member of the permanent forces and an admired and trusted leader, was killed immediately afterwards.

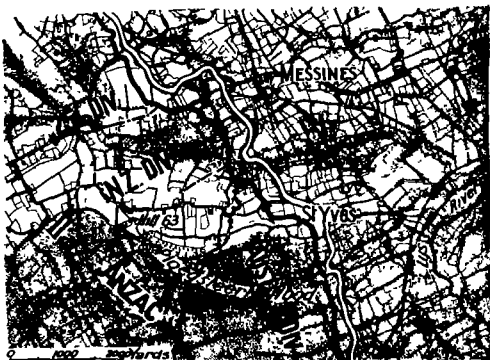
<sup>35</sup> Lieut. J. E. S. Taylor, 44th Bn. Member of Aust. Permanent Forces; of Sydney; b. Sydney, 17 March, 1888. Killed in action, 14 March, 1917.

<sup>36</sup> Lieut. C. D. W. Lintott, M.C.; 44th Bn. Teamster, of Collie, W. Aust.; b. Wimbledon, N.S.W., 1891.

<sup>37</sup> Corporal E. J. Herrod (Dwellingup, W. Aust.), who had been wounded.

<sup>38</sup> The 34th Division had been withdrawn, and the New Zealand Division relieved on Feb. 26 by the new 57th from Great Britain.

their intended battle-front,<sup>39</sup> the southern flank of the 3rd Division, however, still extending to the River Lys, far beyond the intended flank of the attack. The whole of the old II Anzac sector at Armentières, 18,000 yards in extent, was now held by the 57th Division.



It was no mere coincidence that, in the nine weeks after the 3rd Division's raids had ceased, the Germans raided it seven times. It was evident that the enemy had detected some regrouping of British divisions, and was probing to ascertain the extent and meaning of the changes. The 3rd Division was singularly successful in keeping him out. The experience was not new to the division—it had been raided eight times in the previous four months.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>39</sup> The N.Z. Division first relieved the 25th, taking over the whole sector opposite Messines. On March 13 part of the N.Z. sector immediately north of the Lys was taken over by the 11th Aust. Bde. (3rd Division). At the end of March the 3rd Division took over from the New Zealanders the additional sector immediately in front of Ploegsteert. (The famous wood, a mile and half long by half-a-mile wide, was formerly a shooting reserve of the Hennessy family, and covered the lowland south-east of Hill 63. The front line ran along its eastern edge.) On April 3 the 25th Division, returning, relieved the northern part of the N.Z. Division at Wulverghem. On April 27 the 3rd Division's right, south of the Lys was relieved by the 57th Division.

<sup>40</sup> The German raids had been as follows:—

*December—*

9. Two parties tried to enter 38th Battalion's trenches at Hobbs's Farm, south of R. Lys, but were repulsed after reaching the parapet.
12. Party attempted to enter trenches of 39th Battalion, but were driven off.

*January—*

3. 23rd Bav. I.R. tried to raid 40th Battalion at Hobbs's Farm, but failed to pass the wire, and left one man dead.
22. Party raided 36th Battalion south of Lys and took 4 prisoners. The Australians lost 11 killed and 36 wounded. On the German side 6 were killed by fire from Sgt. L. W. C. Gibson's post ("River Post"), specially stationed to cover this approach, and several others by a flanking Lewis gun under Cpl. Nils Nylander. A wounded German was captured.

*February—*

1. Two parties raided 40th Battalion south-east of Armentières.
14. A party reached the 42nd Battalion's parapet at L'EpINETTE and captured two men. The Germans left one of their number killed.
23. A party failed to enter trenches of 39th Battalion and left two of its men killed. The Australian casualties totalled 14.

*March—*

13. A party tried to enter at Hobbs's Farm. The 36th Battalion was prepared, opened fire, and brought down the barrage, and the Germans did not reach the parapet.

In the seven attempts now made, the Germans, as the following particulars show, succeeded only twice.

*March—*

26th. A party attempted to raid the 42nd Battalion in its new position near Le Gheer. The raid was anticipated, the registration by the German artillery having been remarked. The supporting artillery had accordingly been warned, and brought down its barrage promptly. The Germans reached the parapet and threw bombs, but failed to enter.

*April—*

12th. A party tried to raid the 40th Battalion at Hobbs's Farm, but was driven off, leaving two dead near the parapet and several in the wire. An Australian patrol afterwards went out, and from these bodies identified the 228th R.I.R.

15th-16th. Three parties, covered by a very heavy barrage, raided trenches of 11th Brigade. One, near Le Touquet (north of the Lys), succeeded in taking 7 prisoners.

23rd. An attempted raid on 37th Battalion east of Armentières was driven off.

30th. After a very heavy barrage, a party of the 5th Bavarian R.I.R. entered the 39th Battalion's trenches at a "gap" between St. Yves (near Ploegsteert) and Le Gheer. The Germans secured one prisoner but left two dead. They also left behind six heavy charges of explosives, from which it was suspected that they intended to destroy mine-shafts.

*May—*

17th. The Germans tried to raid the 34th Battalion at Le Touquet. The enemy this time employed the British method of a very short, though heavy, preliminary bombardment. The preliminary registration, however, had been observed, and the Australian counter-barrage came down within ten seconds of the S.O.S. signal being fired by Lieutenant Waugh.<sup>41</sup> A party of Bavarians attempted to enter by a gap in the front line. One climbed the parapet and said: "Hands oop!" He was at once shot, and fell dead into the trench. Lewis guns (in particular, that of Private Kirk<sup>42</sup>) drove the enemy off.

18th. The previous night's attempt against the 34th was repeated after short heavy bombardment. On the S.O.S. being fired by Lieutenant Edmonds,<sup>43</sup> the protecting barrage again came down instantly, but five of the enemy entered a gap near a sector in which cylinders had been installed for an impending release of gas. Working along the line, they bombed a Lewis gun team, wounding three. The remaining men, Lance-Corporal Ham<sup>44</sup> and Private Taylor,<sup>45</sup> continued to fire, and killed all five intruders. Lieutenant Brodie<sup>46</sup> and the scouts

<sup>41</sup> Lieut F M Waugh, M.C.; 34th Bn. Public servant; of Ashfield, N.S.W.; b. Ashfield, 21 Dec., 1894. Died 1 Aug., 1924.

<sup>42</sup> Pte J. E. Kirk, M.M. (No. 1416; 34th Bn) Carpenter; of Kurri Kurri, N.S.W.; b. Launceston, Tas., 1882.

<sup>43</sup> Capt. W. W. Edmonds, M.C., 34th Bn. Plumber, of Marrickville, N.S.W.; b. Balmain, N.S.W., 9 March, 1888.

<sup>44</sup> Sgt J Ham, D.C.M. (No. 1530; 34th Bn). Labourer, of Denman, N.S.W.; b. Hall's Creek, N.S.W., 4 March, 1884. Killed in action, 1 Oct., 1917.

<sup>45</sup> L/Cpl. B. G. Taylor, M.M. (No. 1248, 34th Bn.). Dairy farmer; of Central Bucca, N.S.W., b. Goulburn, N.S.W., 9 Jan., 1892. Killed in action, 13 Oct., 1917.

<sup>46</sup> Captain B G Brodie, 34th Bn. Commercial traveller; of North Sydney and Kensington, N.S.W.; b. Parramatta, N.S.W., 4 May, 1885. Killed in action, 5 March, 1918.

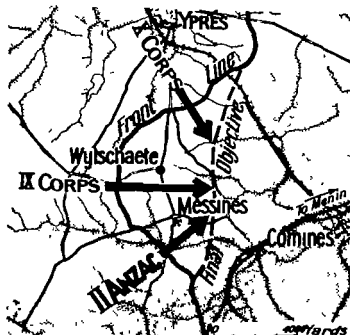
afterwards went out and, driving back the German covering party and stretcher-bearers, brought in a wounded Bavarian pioneer, and evidence of identification from 11 Germans who had been killed.

These performances of the 3rd Division in defence, like its previous record in raiding, were, to say the least, fully up to the standard of the older divisions.<sup>47</sup>

Meanwhile the detailed plans for the Messines offensive were worked out. The main problem for the army and corps commanders was provided by the fact that the first phase of the attack was against an arc of a circle and the second against the

#### Plans of Messines offensive

chord of that arc. The central corps (IX) must therefore advance much farther than the two flank corps (II Anzac and X), each of which, after their first advance, would have to wait a considerable time if all three were to attack the chord together. The difficulty was increased by the fact that the German trench-lines in the centre of the arc were more numerous, comprising not only the front system on the slope or in the valley, and the second system along the crest, but a strong line of posts between. Moreover the second line in that area included one of the two villages, Wytschaete, which had been most strongly fortified.

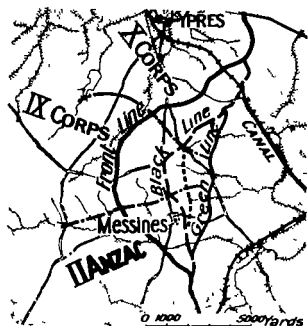


In Plumer's original plan for "pinching out" Wytschaete by an attack from each flank, these difficulties had been avoided. When G.H.Q. objected to that plan the problem was solved by arranging an early halt on the flanks to enable the centre to come up. On the right this halt, lasting about an hour, would occur while the centre of the New Zealand

<sup>47</sup> During this defensive period, the division's offensive action was limited to endeavours by officers with small patrols to enter the German line. On March 31 an unoccupied part of the German trench was entered by a party from the 35th Battalion, and pamphlets containing propaganda were left there. A 44th Battalion patrol entered and examined the German line on April 3. Gas was also discharged by the "Special" companies of the Royal Engineers on the nights of April 28 and 29, and it was afterwards learnt that a number of the 9th Bavarian I.R. in the opposing line were caught during their sleep and some 40 of them gassed.

Division was subduing Messines.<sup>48</sup> The difficulty of co-ordinating the advance was further complicated by the facts that the pace of the New Zealanders' projected advance was throughout much faster than that favoured by the IX Corps,<sup>49</sup> and that the IX Corps had to allow additional halts for reorganisation. Thus, whereas the New Zealanders would seize the main objective—the German second line on the crest just beyond Messines—in two hours, the IX Corps would take four hours to reach the same line further north.

This line on the crest (known in the plans as the "black" line) was the all-important objective. Once secured, it was to be entrenched so solidly that no counter-attack, however fierce, could shake the British tenure. For its safety, and for better observation, a more advanced line of posts was to be thrown forward from it—known as the "black dotted" line. When Haig insisted upon the attack being pushed half-a-mile or so farther still, to seize part of the German guns and the third line, near the eastern foot of the ridge, the "dotted" line of posts filled another important function, to cover the forming-up of the troops for this second attack. This third, or Oosttaerne Line was known for purposes of the attack as the "green" line. The IX Corps commander considered that it would be beyond the power of his three front-line divisions to capture and consolidate the "black" and "black dotted"



lines and also to undertake the advance to the Oosttaerne Line, and he therefore, on May 18th, obtained leave to use for the second attack his reserve division. Similar permission was then given to the other corps. The troops who had captured the "black" and "black dotted" lines were to

<sup>48</sup> Messines would be attacked not by encirclement, for which it was believed to be prepared, but by precisely the opposite method, that of entering the village from the front while the troops on the flanks stood still. Thus, any German machine-guns placed with the intention of enfilading troops sweeping past the village would be taken in rear. The village would be taken before the advance on the flanks was resumed.

<sup>49</sup> One hundred yards in three, as against five, minutes. General Hamilton Gordon (IX Corps), on being pressed by General Godley, quickened his intended rate of progress in some other respects, but he did not agree with the views of II Anzac.



prepare the way for the attack on the Oosttaverne Line by sending patrols to scotch the enemy's nearer guns and to ascertain if the wire of the third line was cut; but the Black Line divisions were not to allow themselves to become involved in the attack on the Oosttaverne Line, or to reinforce the troops there even if help was urgently required.

It was considered dangerous for troops of the flanking corps to begin any of these movements east of the ridge until the central corps was up with them. Consequently the Black Dotted Line of posts was not to be placed until  $5\frac{1}{2}$  hours after the start; the patrols would go out at  $6\frac{1}{2}$  hours; and—to allow time for the assembly of reserve troops and moving up of part of the artillery (especially in the IX Corps area)—the advance to the Oosttaverne Line would take place 10 hours after the start. As the start would be at the first glimmer of dawn, 3.10 a.m., the other events would be timed as follows:

New Zealanders reach Black Line—5.20 a.m.

IX Corps reaches Black Line—7.20 a.m.

Advance of posts to Black Dotted Line—8.40 a.m.

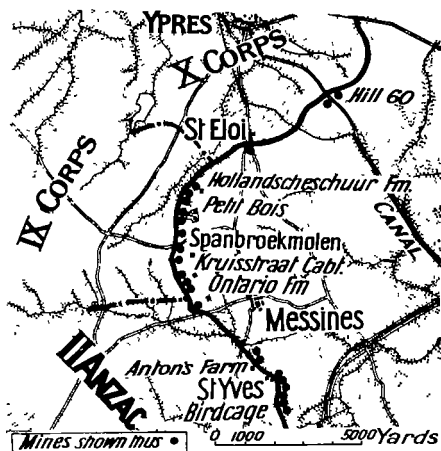
Patrols go out—9.40 a.m.

Attack on Oosttaverne Line—1.10 p.m.

In drawing its plans the Second Army staff had constantly in mind the experience of Arras, and was largely guided by the methods of the Canadian Corps at Vimy. Thus, in order to prevent the enemy from using machine-guns scattered over the open between the main positions, and so firing from a distance *through* the curtain of fire, the barrage was deepened. The detailed arrangements varied, each divisional commander being, within limits, allowed to arrange the barrage for his own troops, although the whole of the artillery in the corps was temporarily placed under orders of the corps artillery commander. The general plan was that, while half or more of the eighteen-pounders would throw a creeping barrage in front of the infantry, the remainder of the field artillery and half the medium and heavy artillery would bombard the trenches ahead of the barrage, lifting their fire to the next trench when the infantry came within a certain distance of their shell-bursts. Together with the machine-guns—64 to each

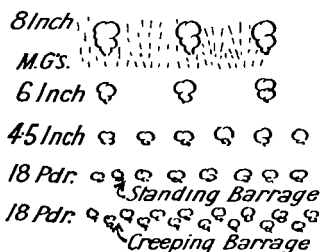
division—they would thus in effect create a curtain of fire at least 700 yards deep.<sup>50</sup> Part of the heavy artillery would lay its fire beyond the flanks, but more than half of it would be shelling the enemy batteries. To deceive the enemy, the barrage was to extend for 1,000 yards beyond the flanks. When each objective was reached, the barrage would sweep forward 1,000 yards in order to catch any force assembling for counter-attack. On the order of the Commander-in-Chief, additional brigades of field artillery were to be placed close behind the front line to cover the afternoon attack, these guns not to disclose themselves until the battle began.<sup>51</sup>

By the date of the battle twenty-three deep mines had been tunnelled beneath the German front line in the area of the attack, or on its flanks, and heavily charged. The commencement of this work had been ordered in January 1916, and some of the mines had actually been ready for a year. They were tunnelled through the blue clay beneath the watery stratum, and the Germans, thwarted by the difficulties of that layer, had in many places failed to



<sup>50</sup> On the II Anzac front the 8-inch and 9.2-inch howitzers would lift when the infantry came within 400 yards; the 6-inch howitzers when it came within 300, the 4.5-inch howitzers when it came within 250, and the standing barrage of 18-pounders when the moving barrage caught up with it. The machine-guns would throw a moving barrage 400-600 yards ahead of the 18-pounder barrage; some of the 4.5-inch howitzers would "creep" along the communication trenches 250 yards ahead of the 18-pounders.

<sup>51</sup> The artillery of the divisions of Plumer's reserve corps (XIV) was used for this purpose, II Anzac being given the artillery of the Guards Division.



discover their existence, and had merely defended themselves against the British shallow mining system nearer the surface.<sup>52</sup>

In 1917 the Germans appeared to suspect deep mining in the central sector of the Wytschaete salient, for they blew many *camouflets*, and a great mine, already charged, at Spanbroekmolen, was for three months cut off by the wrecking of its gallery. The British miners, however, succeeded in getting through to it four days before the Messines attack. On the whole front of attack the Germans were outplayed with comparative ease by the British, Canadian, and Australian miners, except at one point, the northernmost in the system, Hill 60. In this crucial corner of the Ypres salient mining had been in progress since 1914, and the Germans in September 1916 almost broke through from one of their galleries into the deep system that the Canadian tunnellers had already driven beneath their line. The long struggle in which they were headed away from the two huge charges, first by the Canadians but for the last six months by the 1st Australian Tunnelling Company, forms an episode of such thrilling interest that it is narrated in detail in an appendix to this volume.<sup>53</sup>

Experiment had shown that the débris thrown up even by so large mines would fall within twenty seconds and would not endanger troops in the open more than 200 yards away.<sup>54</sup> It was hoped that by careful synchronisation of watches the mines could be fired within ten seconds of one another.<sup>55</sup> It was therefore considered safe to explode them at "zero" hour, that is, the moment fixed for the fall of the barrage and the advance of the infantry.

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<sup>52</sup> During the first half of 1916 the Germans exploded many mines in or near their own line—a proceeding which greatly puzzled the British experts. It was supposed at the time that they intended to use the craters as fortifications. From an old crater in No-Man's Land the Germans heard the work in one of the deep British mines at Petit Bois, near Wytschaete, and, sinking a shaft, blew in part of the gallery, entombing a dozen men. Within ten days the British miners recovered their gallery by working round the shattered part. Near Messines, at Petite Douve, where a mine had been laid and charged, a branch gallery ran almost into some German works. The Germans exploded a *camouflet*, which destroyed the main British gallery, and the mine was lost.

<sup>53</sup> See Appendix No. 1, pp. 949-959.

<sup>54</sup> Trenches were considered unsafe up to 300 yards away, and dugouts to 400.

<sup>55</sup> This exactness was not attained. Major-General R. N. Harvey, who timed the first and last earthquake states that 45 seconds elapsed between the firing of the first and last mines. The time officially recorded was 19 seconds, and almost all the mines were probably exploded within that time. The troops had been told that, if a mine was not fired within ten seconds of "zero," it would not be fired at all.

As for the infantry tactics—nine divisions would attack on a front of about 17,000 yards, an average of 1,900 yards to each division. In the 3rd Australian, General Monash decided to attack with two brigades, each employing two battalions in the capture of the German front system and bringing in a third in the advance to the Black Line. As the division was responsible for the right flank of the offensive, its right brigade (the 9th, N.S.W.), though likely to encounter heavy resistance, would not have to penetrate so deep as the left (10th, Victoria). The remaining battalion of the 9th Brigade would therefore be used for carrying and for reserve, while that of the 10th would be retained for the afternoon advance on the Oostaverne Line, in which only the left of this division would take part. On the fronts of the New Zealand and 25th Divisions the reserve division of II Anzac would move through and undertake the afternoon attack.

The rôle of the 3rd Division was thus a fairly heavy and responsible one for a staff and troops that had never before engaged in a major operation; and, the time being ample, there was concentrated upon the plans an amount of thought and care far beyond that ever devoted to any other scheme of operations produced by a staff of the A.I.F. For purposes of secrecy the project was known throughout the division as the "*Magnum Opus*," and the arrangements for it came to resemble those rather of an enormous raid than of an ordinary offensive. After obtaining the detailed proposals of the brigade commanders, General Monash himself worked out the programme of the fight for each battalion, particularising in some cases the employment of platoons and even of sections. The division's front of attack would extend from the north-eastern slope of Hill 63, south of Messines, to St. Yves. Consequently the left flank would have to cross in No-Man's Land the small stream of the Douve, which passed obliquely across No-Man's Land and round the southern edge of Messines Ridge. On the British maps there was a note against this stream: "12 feet of water in winter, nearly dry in summer." Monash prudently assumed that it would be unfordable, and the leading battalion on that flank (the 40th, Tasmania) was given, as its first task in the attack, that of laying across it a



# 27. MESSINES UNDER BOMBARDMENT

Although the village is here shown under German bombardment on 8th June, 1917, the view presents it as it was under the British bombardment before the battle. The River Douve, where crossed by the 3rd Australian Division, runs across the middle distance, and on the sky-line to the right are the trees along "Huns' Walk".

*British Official Photo. By courtesy of the Imperial War Museum  
First War Memorial Collection No. H12261*



28. ONE OF THE BRIDGES LAID BY THE 40TH BATTALION ACROSS THE DOUVE

*Aust. War Memorial Official Photo No. E1286  
Taken on 20th November, 1917*

*To face p 577*

number of small bridges.<sup>56</sup> The following battalion (38th, Victoria) of the same brigade would cross the bridges and, in accordance with programme, seize the southern shoulder of the Messines Ridge on the flank of the New Zealanders.



South of the Douve the attack would be carried out from the trenches east of Ploegsteert mainly by the 9th Brigade,<sup>57</sup> and it was on the front of this brigade that all the mines in the Australian and New Zealand sectors would be exploded. The 3rd Canadian Tunnelling Company would fire them, two opposite the brigade's left and two opposite its right.<sup>58</sup> The southernmost,<sup>59</sup> at "Factory Farm," would be slightly beyond the right flank of the attack, which would rest on its twin crater 200 yards farther north near St. Yves.<sup>60</sup> The ground for the right of the advance was a long open down-slope. This would render it difficult for the enemy to counter-attack, but it also meant that the attacking troops and parties bringing supplies would be exposed to fire from Germans beyond the flank. During the attack, however, the flank would be protected by a smoke-screen, and carrying parties might be sheltered by quickly putting through communication trenches. To enable this to be done in the sectors of both brigades there had long since been tunnelled immediately below the surface a pair of "Russian saps."<sup>61</sup> One

<sup>56</sup> Five platoons, starting from the New Zealand area north of the river, would take from the rear the trenches bordering the stream, and five more would advance south of it, carrying wooden bridges which they must lay across it in at least six places.

<sup>57</sup> The 39th Battalion (10th Brigade) also would advance along the southern side of the Douve, seizing that side of the valley; but as soon as the attack ended it would hand over the ground to the 9th Brigade.

<sup>58</sup> The British also had four mines ready charged beneath the German trench at "The Birdcage" (Le Pélerin), 400 yards farther south. It was at first intended to explode these also, but this decision was altered. If the mines were fired, the craters might be useful to the enemy, whereas if they were kept ready to fire they might greatly assist a later operation. In the end, owing to the subsequent German retirement, they were not fired.

<sup>59</sup> See Vol. XII, plate 328.

<sup>60</sup> This flank crater was the only one within 200 yards of the Australian front line, and a short length of the trenches opposite had to be cleared of troops before the explosion.

<sup>61</sup> These works (whose positions are shown by dotted lines in the above marginal sketch) were shallow galleries that could be turned into communication trenches by cutting through the remaining cover. As soon as the attack began, they would be uncovered by the Canadian tunnellers and the 3rd Aust. Pioneers.

additional communication trench would also be cut across No-Man's Land and linked to the German trench-system. The existing trench tramway system was similarly to be extended to join the German tramway routes. Along the whole army front water was brought to the forward area by pipe-lines; it would be forwarded thence in petrol cans. To save man power, the carriage of these tins and other supplies was to be effected as far as possible by mules.

By May 27th, on which day the 3rd Division's operation order was issued, its schemes had already been elaborated in thirty-six successive circulars, of which one, the instructions for the machine-guns, comprised seven parts. The attack had been practised by each brigade in the training area, and the objectives and arrangements explained to companies and platoons by reference to two large models of the battlefield which had been constructed beside roads a few miles behind the front, showing in miniature the trenches, entanglements, streams, roads, and ruins.<sup>62</sup>

The artillery preparation had begun long before the attack was definitely authorised, while fighting at Arras was in full swing. The object of this early commencement was not only "to inflict serious damage," which would take the enemy several months to repair, but also to make him believe that a "serious attack" was then imminent at Messines, and so prevent him reinforcing at Arras. The early preparations of roads and railways all helped to this end, and a number of newly-trained batteries of heavy artillery were sent to the area.<sup>63</sup> At this stage each divisional staff informed the artillery of the points which it specially desired to be bombarded.<sup>64</sup> and the systematic destruction of these began.

<sup>62</sup> One, on a scale of 1 in 50, had been made by the II Anzac Corps, and the other (1 in 100) by the 3rd Division. In both the heights were necessarily exaggerated. (See *Vol. XII, plate 326.*) Other models had been made by Army and other authorities.

<sup>63</sup> The headquarters of the 36th Heavy Artillery Group, previously with the II Corps, north of Bapaume, was also brought thither. This headquarters was an Australian unit, now under Lieutenant-Colonel J. H. Hurst (Sydney).

<sup>64</sup> The careful nature of the 3rd Division's staff work is illustrated by the fact that it presented for bombardment in specified order a list including 10 light railway centres, 7 bridges, 18 dumps, 13 cable junctions, 5 battalion headquarters, and 9 company headquarters, amplified later by a list of 23 headquarters, 39 buried-cable junctions, 34 tramway traffic centres and dumps, 7 bridges, positions of 49 machine-guns and 41 trench-mortars, 31 observation posts, and 170 dugouts or occupied houses, the supposed positions of all being indicated to within five yards. This information was drawn by the divisional intelligence officer, Lieutenant F. M. Cutlack (Renmark, S. Aust., and Sydney), from prisoners' statements and examination of aeroplane photographs.



Some of the targets, however, such as headquarters and telephone-exchanges, were deliberately left intact until just before the battle, so that after destruction they could not be repaired. Finally, in order to raise the indignation of his troops, General Monash circulated an account of the harsh treatment of Australian prisoners taken at Bullecourt.<sup>65</sup>

Within a few days of Haig's order of May 7th transferring the offensive to Flanders, troops and guns began to pour into the Second Army, and among the first came the 4th Australian Division, to serve as reserve division of the II Anzac Corps. This division had been out of the line for nearly a month since its fateful attack with the tanks—"First Bullecourt"—and had filled up its ranks to within 1,600 of their "established" strength and put in some valuable training. Thus it was that on May 16th the troops of the newest and most carefully handled of the Australian divisions found arriving in a neighbouring area battalions of the most rugged and recently-battered division. It was an interesting contrast; an Australian diarist writes:

Had dinner at Steenwerck<sup>66</sup> café with some 3rd Div. and some 4th Div. officers. The 3rd Division men were a little shy of the 4th Div. to start with, though they were from the same States—South Australia and Western Australia. But 3rd Div. is finding its feet.

The 4th Division was at first quartered at Neuf and Vieux Berquin and Doulieu. It was almost new to Flanders, and was on its best behaviour. "Crime is entirely absent," records a battalion commander. "Men are taking a keen interest in themselves and everything." One battalion, the 45th, was at once detailed for unloading ammunition, but there was as yet no word of the 4th Division being employed in the offensive. From May 22nd onwards, however, it was inspected by a succession of high commanders—Commander-in-Chief, Plumer, Godley—always an ominous sign; and on May 26th came the order that on the day of the offensive it would carry out the afternoon attack.

This was an unpleasant shock. Whereas the other divisions of I Anzac had just been brought out from Bullecourt into a back area for the longest and most complete rest

<sup>65</sup> See pp 342-3 This circular had no recorded effect.

<sup>66</sup> The Flemish village in which was the headquarters of the 3rd Division.

ever yet granted to infantry of the A.I.F., the 4th now saw itself involved with II Anzac in the Battle of Messines—that is to say, in one more offensive than any of its sisters. From this time onward it possessed the consciousness and the reputation of being the hardest worked and least rested of the Australian divisions. Officers and men, however, had by this time learned to accept orders with comforting fatalism, and, after the first shock of the announcement, they accepted their rôle in the offensive as “part of their luck.”

The 4th Divisional orders were as short as those of the 3rd Division were long, but the model-map made by the Corps was of great assistance in explaining them to the men. The division decided to carry out its afternoon attack (against the Green Line in front of the New Zealand and 25th Divisions) with two brigades, each of which would employ two battalions. These would march to the battlefield shortly after day-break, form up in the shelter of Messines Ridge (captured by their predecessors), and then, shortly before the hour for the afternoon attack, move over the ridge in artillery formation, shaking out into extended order after they had passed north and south of Messines. Here they would get touch with the fresh troops of the IX Corps on their left, and of the 3rd Division on their right, and at the hour stated would advance down the long slope to the German third line. As it was expected that the ridge would be crowded with troops, the two remaining battalions of each brigade would be held far back in the old British front and reserve lines.

At the time of the arrival of the 4th Division there had also begun to pour into the Second Army's area a huge force of artillery. This left the Arras region about May 15th, and in the week beginning May 18th there came into the II Anzac area alone 37 heavy batteries and 5 field artillery brigades, many of them from the Bullecourt area. On May 25th another 5 brigades of “army” field artillery came in. When this influx ended, the Second Army had ready for the offensive some 2,400 guns and howitzers

**The  
Preparatory  
Bombardment**

of which over 800 were heavy artillery.<sup>67</sup> Never before on the British front had there been such a concentration. At Arras there had been a gun or howitzer to every 9 yards of front, but here there was one to every 7. The batteries went into position as they arrived. In the II Anzac sector the hedges behind Hill 63 and Ploegsteert Wood teemed with them,<sup>68</sup> the guns and ammunition both being hidden from aeroplane observers and photographers by overhead screens of netting interlaced with tufts of raffia and torn strips of hessian. The fresh batteries registered and began at once to take up their tasks.

Haig's general policy in this final bombardment was an astute one. Whereas previously, to assist the Arras fighting, he had tried to make the enemy believe that the Messines bombardment heralded a serious offensive, the endeavour now was to continue the impression, which the Germans must by this time have formed, that it was merely a blind.<sup>69</sup> The response of the German artillery was spasmodic until the night of May 28th, when it began to reply to the British night-firing.<sup>70</sup> Camps, roads, dumps were shelled, and from that moment there began to grow throughout the area that feeling of tension—a nightmarish sense of some monstrous motive lying behind ordinary scenes, behind ordinary noises and silences and ordinary actions—which preceded almost all the great offensives.

<sup>67</sup> This artillery was far more ample than that originally promised for the offensive, as will be seen from the following table:—

	Artillery promised by G.H.Q. on			
	15 June, 1916.	3 April, 1917.	5 May, 1917.	In Second Army 7 June, 1917.
Field artillery (guns and howitzers)	—	1,200	1,598	1,510
60-pounders (or 4.7-in. guns)	120	180	186	198
6-in. howitzers .. ..	140	260	316	348
8-in. and 9.2-in. howitzers ..	108	168	216	232
12-in. howitzers .. ..	28	8	12	20
6-in. guns .. ..	8	16	20	24
9.2-in. and 12-in. guns ..	3	—	3	3
15-in. howitzers .. ..	—	2 or 3	3	3

The Second Army staff reckoned all its heavy artillery as being "engaged" in these operations even though not on the "active" portion of its front. In addition, 64 heavy and 240 medium trench-mortars were employed on that part of the front. An additional 202 field-guns and 4.5-inch howitzers were employed on defensive sectors of the Second Army front.

<sup>68</sup> See Vol. XII, plates 327, 337.

<sup>69</sup> The actual attitude of the Germans at this juncture is described on pp. 598-9.

<sup>70</sup> When the British, on May 4, had begun systematic counter-battery fire, the Germans had made a sharp reply, bombarding the British back areas on the nights of May 5 and 6. On the night of the 7th almost the whole of the British artillery opposite had twice replied with two minutes' concentrated bombardment.

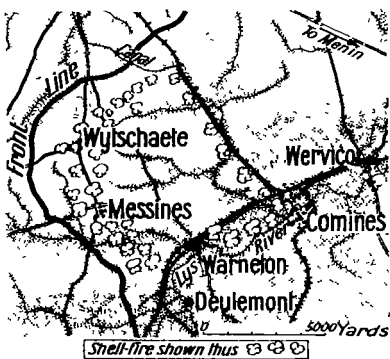
The concentrated preparatory bombardment, which had originally been planned to last five days, June 2nd-6th, was on May 30th suddenly ordered to begin next day. This change was due to an apprehension on Haig's part that the Germans might follow the policy laid down in a captured treatise and prematurely withdraw from their front line.<sup>71</sup> On May 30th Plumer had been sent for to discuss this possibility and also the remedy, which was, in Haig's opinion, to make certain of crushing the German artillery. There was a danger, however, that the Germans might keep their batteries concealed to the last moment, as they had recently done in meeting Nivelles's attack. They must therefore be forced to disclose them, and Haig suggested that this might be done by exploding the mines on an earlier day than that of the attack. Plumer was instructed to consult his corps commanders. All of them were against prematurely blowing the mines, and, as Haig had by then come round to the same view, it was decided to make the German guns disclose themselves by closely imitating, at least twice during the bombardment, the barrage accompanying the attack. The bombardment would be extended to seven days, the two last days being devoted to crushing the German guns.

Five weeks' shelling had already stripped the Messines Ridge of most of its green, but under the incessant fire of these seven days—days of gloriously fine, bright weather—the landmarks on its slope disappeared in a waste of shattered earth crowned by the now formless ruins of the village. This result was achieved with deadly method. The field artillery and heavy and medium trench-mortars battered down or tore up the nearer wire, while, for the first five days, the heavy howitzers (except one-third, which continually engaged the German batteries) cut the distant wire and pounded specified targets. A constant stream of prisoners, whose supply was kept up by daily and nightly raids, furnished information by which the effect of the fire was checked and new targets added.<sup>72</sup> The villages in and behind the enemy line were bombarded in turn with short heavy

<sup>71</sup> The method suggested in this pamphlet was—to withdraw, and, on the first sign of attack, lay a barrage on both British and German front lines and No-Man's Land, and so crush the offensive before it developed.

<sup>72</sup> For the raids carried out by the 3rd Division see pp. 585-6.

bursts.<sup>73</sup> Every night, in order to keep rations from the German troops, a double ring of shell-fire was placed on the routes by which their food approached—an outer ring on the Lys canal crossings and roads near them, an inner one on tracks and communication trenches closer to the front. Nightly, towards the end of the bombardment, the German batteries were shelled with gas, not so much to reduce their fire as to force the gun-crews to wear their masks and thus deny them sleep.



At some time on almost every day one of the three corps for ten minutes practised its barrage,<sup>74</sup> and, at 3.15 p.m. on June 3rd, after fifteen minutes' bombardment by the heavy artillery,<sup>75</sup> the artillery did this on the whole front of attack. In order that the German artillery observers might be prevented from recognising, by the absence of attacking infantry, that the operation was a feint, the field artillery placed in the barrage a screen of smoke. The foot of the ridge was thus suddenly fringed by the curling snow-white bursts of smoke-shell, which presently began to move up the hill until they were barely visible in the tawny dust-cloud churned up by the bombardment. British aeroplanes were out waiting for the enemy guns to disclose themselves, but few replied and only three new battery-positions were detected. It was thought that the absence of a general machine-gun barrage might have prevented the enemy from being deceived, and a percentage of the machine-guns was therefore ordered to participate in the second general barrage on June 5th. But the reply of the German artillery on that occasion also was slight.

<sup>73</sup> Messines, Comines, Deulemont, Warneton, Mai Cornet were among those bombarded. On June 5 La Basse Ville was bombarded for a quarter of an hour. It received this day 750 6-inch, 600 9.2-inch, and 18 12-inch shells.

<sup>74</sup> The neighbouring artillery joined in so as not to indicate the corps boundaries for the attack.

<sup>75</sup> This was arranged in order to lead the enemy to expect, wrongly, an intense bombardment *before* the attack.

Through observation on other days, however, the German battery positions were largely known. It had been remarked that since May 18th the enemy had been bringing up additional artillery and placing it either in his back area or close outside the flanks of the intended attack, which, in spite of efforts to deceive him, he had obviously guessed with accuracy. On the sixth and seventh days of the bombardment more than half the British heavy howitzers<sup>76</sup> were turned upon the opposing artillery, several batteries of II Anzac being specially sent into Armentières to fire on the enemy batteries massed on that flank. The results were daily reported by the directing aeroplanes, the reports on June 5th and 6th being as follows:

Date			German gun-pits destroyed	Gun-pits damaged	Explosions caused
June 5	..	..	19	27	21
June 6	..	..	27	36	21

The destruction on previous days had been almost as great.

An enemy like the Germans would not suffer this treatment without making every possible reply. The line affected was held by four and a half German divisions which, according to the British estimate, would now have 90 guns per division. The total support, including artillery on the flanks, would thus perhaps amount to 500 guns. These were faced by over 2,000, and their retaliation did not bear comparison with the bombardment which they were suffering. Nevertheless, the roads behind Hill 63, especially the junction known as "Hyde Park Corner," became dangerous. Batteries in the neighbouring hedges were shelled; the small dumps of ammunition near the guns were constantly blown up.<sup>77</sup> At 8.30 on June 5th an enemy airman

<sup>76</sup> On the first five days about 150 heavy and medium howitzers were employed on counter-battery work, and 350 on general bombardment. On June 5 and 6—and on the 7th for 30 minutes after "zero"—260 were on counter-battery, and 240 on general bombardment.

<sup>77</sup> See Vol. XII, plates 327, 337. The extinction of burning ammunition constantly called for swift and gallant action. On the night of May 27 shells set fire to the big "Kandahar Dump," but the conflagration was put out by a party including three of the 4th Divisional Ammunition Column—Farrier-Sergeant A. E. Miles, of Summerfield, Vic., and Drivers J. McM. Noble, of Connewarre, Vic. (who died on 21 Feb., 1928), and W. F. Comrie, of Perth, W. Aust. On May 29 Gunner G. M. Armytage (Glenthompson, Vic.) and on June 4 Sergeant N. McMurray (Sea Lake, Vic., and Sydney) put out fires threatening the ammunition of the 30th Battery.

During the practice barrage of June 3 the Germans concentrated with field-guns and 4.2- and 5.9-inch howitzers on the position of the 31st Battery. The camouflage over the ammunition was soon burning at many points, but Lieutenant C. Galt

dropped a bomb on an ammunition train of II Anzac at one of the specially-built railheads near Bailleul. All the morning its trucks continued to explode.<sup>78</sup> As, however, seventeen similar trains were arriving daily in the Second Army area, the loss was negligible. The British casualties in men during the bombardment were also trifling.<sup>79</sup> To limit the loss, the whole battle-front of the 3rd Division was held during the last five days of the bombardment by one battalion, the 41st (Queensland), of the 11th Brigade, which would be in reserve during the attack. The front trench indeed was barely held,<sup>80</sup> but under the bombardment that they were receiving the Germans lay low in their shelters, almost completely inactive except when they were raided, which happened frequently, sometimes by day under cover of practice barrages.<sup>81</sup> Behind, in Ploegsteert Wood and the rear area,

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(St. Kilda, Vic.), Bombardier P. L. Sperber (St. Kilda, Vic.; died 26 Jan., 1927), and five others extinguished the fires and saved 7,500 rounds. On the night of June 5 a fire was similarly extinguished in the 27th Battery by Bombardier F. Bradley (Footscray, Vic.) and Gunner J. R. Gemmell (Claremont, W. Aust.). A very gallant action, though not occasioned by enemy fire, was that of Lance-Corporal R. E. Cargill of the 10th Light Trench Mortar Battery, who, seeing smoke issuing from a bag of Stokes mortar shells that was being loaded on a tram-truck at Hyde Park Corner, told his men to lie down, and pulled the bag from the truck and threw it away before the explosion which, in spite of this, caused many casualties. Cargill belonged to June, N.S.W.

<sup>78</sup> Molten remains of the ammunition here burnt are in the Australian War Memorial Museum.

<sup>79</sup> A few units, however, suffered. The 38th Battalion, for example, lost 160 men in the nineteen days prior to June 2, but chiefly in a raid and through the inaccurate fire of certain supporting siege batteries newly arrived in France. Losses were also incurred in the shelling of Pont de Nieppe by the enemy. Of a bombardment of this village on June 4 Private G. H. J. Davies (Coff's Harbour, N.S.W.; killed in action on 12 July, 1917), 36th Battalion, wrote. "Two civilian children were killed in the village, and one civilian woman; others were gassed, some dying." On June 6 about twenty-five of the 42nd Battalion and many civilians were hit. Captain A. Juett (Day Dawn, W. Aust.), medical officer of the 42nd, and two French interpreters, Messieurs R. J. L. Chatelaine and Videll, attended to the women and children and cleared them to safety. Videll was killed.

<sup>80</sup> An Australian who visited the line on June 2 wrote: "The Germans had been shelling the trench fairly heavily . . . The front line looked as dusty and dishevelled as if a mouse had been at work in an old cellar. We poked along bay after bay of it (for about 150 yards) as deserted as a school in the holidays, until in one corner . . . we found a man (of the 41st). He was entirely by himself—his mate had gone along the trench to see the next post. He was there to stick out whatever horrors the next few days had in store. In front of him was going forward the most systematic bombardment in history; and he was reading a paper novel." The 41st lost about twenty men daily during this period.

<sup>81</sup> In the 3rd Division the programme of raids was by no means wholly successful, as the following summary shows:

May 27-28. 7 officers and 214 others of the 38th Battalion (under Captain F. E. Fairweather) were to raid in two parties the German lines opposite "Anton's Farm." But of the left party of 100, no less than 60 were hit by the fire of heavy artillery units lately brought from Great Britain. A party under Lieutenant W. H. McCulloch (St. Kilda, Vic.) entered the German trench, against opposition, and Lieutenant T. H. Kennedy (Green Hill, Vic.; killed in action on 15 April, 1918) led his men to the second German trench. Private F. Lock (Moolort, Vic.; killed in action on 13 Oct., 1917) worked round

the 9th and 10th Brigades themselves prepared and marked the four tracks by which on the night of the 6th they would move to the trenches, completed their brigade and battalion headquarters, buried their telephone cables, laid their tramways, and filled their dumps.<sup>82</sup>

Only once was work seriously interfered with, on the night of June 3rd, when from 10 to 1.30 the German field-guns steadily poured gas and lachrymatory shell into Ploegsteert Wood, causing much trouble to the artillery

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a party of Germans there, killed several, and captured a corporal of the 5th Bav. R.I.R., who proved a useful prisoner; but the raiding party had 2 officers and 28 others killed or missing, and 2 officers and 63 wounded.

*May 28-29.* 4 officers and 130 others of the 39th Battalion, under Captain P. L. Smith (South Yarra, Vic.; died of wounds on 2 Sept., 1918), raided near La Douve Farm under a barrage. The German support line was reached and thoroughly searched, but only three or four Germans were seen, and none captured. The Victorians had 7 killed and 33 wounded, mostly by German shell-fire in No-Man's Land. A dugout was blown up.

A party of 50 of the 33rd Battalion, under Lieutenant K. J. Campbell (Alvie, Vic.), easily entered the German trenches near St. Yves and blew up a dugout. They shot a German, the only one seen. The 33rd had 9 wounded, 2 missing.

A patrol of 5 men under Lieutenant E. Shannon (Drummoyne, N.S.W.), 34th Battalion, entered the German front line, examined it, and shot one or two of the garrison.

*May 30-31.* A party of the 40th Battalion tried to enter the German lines south of the Douve without artillery assistance. They found the wire cut but the trench well held by Germans, who met them with rifle and machine-gun fire and bombs. The party fought the enemy with bombs, but did not succeed, and suffered 14 casualties.

One man, Private W. Kelty (Longford, Tas.), entered the trench but was knocked unconscious and left there. Next day, when the Australian trench-mortars were firing, one of their bombs blew the body of a man out of the German trench into No-Man's Land. The man was seen to get up, stagger towards the Australian line, and then collapse. Seeing that he was an Australian, Lieutenant S. Le Fevre (Burwood, Vic.; killed in action on 30 Aug. 1918), of the 39th, walked straight over the parapet and brought him in. It was Kelty. He afterwards fought at Morlancourt and lost a leg.

*May 31-June 1.* Five patrols were sent out without special artillery action. No prisoner was secured. Patrols of the 37th Battalion could not get in, the Germans laying a barrage on their own firing line. The 42nd were in the enemy trench for ten minutes, but saw only one German.

In the 34th Battalion two small parties under Lieutenants Brodie and Shannon entered the German front line and, though meeting with opposition, drove back the Germans and bombed their dugouts. Shannon was killed. His body was brought back. No prisoner was taken.

*June 4.* Under cover of a practice barrage, two parties of the 11th Brigade were to raid. That of the 44th Battalion, led by Lieutenants F. O. Gaze (Gnowangerup, W. Aust.) and C. D. W. Lintott (Collie, W. Aust.), secured 4 prisoners. The lorries bringing up the 43rd's party were blocked at Hyde Park Corner. The barrage was just over when it arrived, but its keen young commander, Lieutenant F. Colman (Glebe Point, N.S.W.), led it forward. Machine-guns opened; Colman and Sergeant H. E. Argus (an Adelaide clergyman) were killed, and Sergeant G. A. C. Gardiner (Prospect, S. Aust.; killed in action on 30 June, 1917) had to lead and extricate the party. The 43rd had 8 casualties.

*June 5-6.* A party of the 42nd under Lieutenant J. H. N. Price (Brisbane) entered the German trench and chased the enemy, but could get no prisoner. A party of the 33rd also raided.

<sup>82</sup> The 11th Brigade had, among other tasks, a delicate one of removing gas-cylinders which had been installed in the front line but not discharged. After one unsuccessful attempt, this was carried out by Captain Biles's company of the 44th.



there and to carrying parties.<sup>83</sup> On the two following nights also some gas was flung into the wood,<sup>84</sup> but by June 6th arrangements for the attack were fully completed. Shortly after dark that night on all parts of the front of operations the approach march of the infantry began.

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<sup>83</sup> Lieutenant W. G. Fisher (Brisbane; killed in action on 5 April, 1918), 42nd Battalion, who with a party of 25 had gone to work in the front line, wrote in his diary that, on the return journey—after a short halt on catching the smell of gas—"we ran into the worst mess I've been in. He poured over gas-shells in hundreds, we could hardly see our way. Four ammunition dumps blew up. Several times we were some of us blown down by explosions, and then he poured over his H.E. I thought we'd never get through. I was sick—we all were—coughing and staggering with our eyes streaming tears. . . . Gas was thick all along the four miles of road. . . . One woman died in this town. The doctor sent me off to bed and sent 11 of my men to hospital."

<sup>84</sup> Because gas would lie there much longer than in the open.

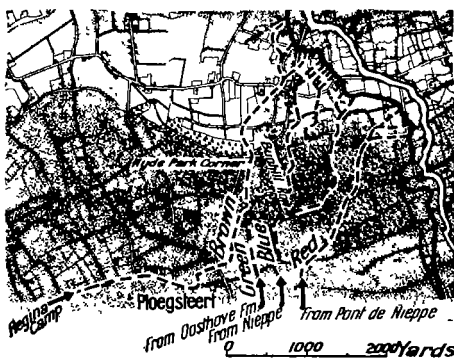
## CHAPTER XV

### THE BATTLE OF MESSINES—JUNE 7TH

BEFORE most great attacks on the Western Front, during that critical last night in which, generally, the infantry left its billets and made its way, first, in column of fours on dark roads beside moving wheel and motor traffic, then, usually in file, along tracks marked across the open, and finally into communication trenches to wind silently out in the small hours and line the "jumping-off" trenches or white tapes laid in the long wet grass of open No-Man's Land, where for an hour or two it must await the signal to assault—during these critical hours one thought was usually uppermost in the men's minds: does the enemy know?

With the tactics of 1917, involving tremendous preparatory bombardments, which entailed months of preliminary railway and road construction, G.H.Q. had been forced to give up the notion of keeping an attack secret until it was delivered. Enemy airmen could not fail to observe these works and also the new camps, supply centres, casualty clearing stations, hangars for aeroplanes. Reference has been made to the Commander-in-Chief's desire to impart the impression, in April, of a serious attack, and, in May, of a feint. But the final week's bombardment had given sure notice of the operation, and the most that could be hoped for was that the enemy might be deceived as to the main stroke that would come after, and might continue to expect it at Arras rather than at Ypres. As far as the Messines offensive went, the Germans must know that a great attack—whether feint or principal operation—was imminent; indeed, German prisoners spoke with certainty of it. But the enemy would not know the date and hour unless he actually detected the troops concentrating, or captured some well-informed soldier who was so imprudent or unfaithful as to speak of these matters. If the enemy had secured that information, then, while the British infantry was filing to its positions, the German artillery and machine-gunners would be waiting on some signal to crush them in No-Man's Land or to put into action some other plan for shattering their assembly.

When, shortly after 11 p.m. on June 6th, the eight attack-battalions of the 3rd Australian Division left their several camps and their billets between Romarin and Pont de Nieppe, to move by four well-marked and reconnoitred routes to Ploegsteert Wood and through it to the front, some of them heard almost at once the soft pat pat of exploding gas-shells. While waiting to start from the gate of "Regina Camp," the 40th Battalion had caught the smell of German gas, and, as the march started, these shells began to fall like the scattered



The 3rd Division's "Red," "Blue," "Green," and "Brown" assembly routes.

heavy drops before a thunder-shower. The battalion immediately put on its gas-masks,<sup>1</sup> a proceeding which gave complete immunity against gas but always caused trouble if heavy labour was undertaken. For troops in masks the mere effort of marching under the load of rifle, ammunition, tools, and rations, and the excitement of the occasion, caused heavy breathing and consequent distress. This, in addition to the half-blindness of the troops in masks, so slowed the pace that officers and N.C.O's responsible for directing the column were often forced to take the risk of pulling down their masks and retaining only the mouth-pieces between their teeth and the clips on their nostrils. Horses and mules were passed on the road gasping piteously in the poisonous air.

The other seven battalions also were meeting with steady gas-shelling, and on their entering Ploegsteert Wood, in whose stagnant air the gas lay densely, the difficulties increased. Long stoppages occurred, intervals of tense anxiety for all ranks. The Germans were shelling the wood more heavily, using high-explosive and incendiary shells as well. One of these exploded a dump near the track of the northernmost

<sup>1</sup> These were part of the very efficient anti-gas equipment known as the "small box-respirator," or "S.B.R."

column, close under Hill 63, checking the march for a moment. Two incendiary shells burst among the 40th, and a little farther on, at "Hyde Park Corner," a high-explosive shell shattered a Lewis gun team. A high-explosive shell burst in the leading platoon of the 39th as it reached "Ploegsteert Corner." Here and there officers and men were hit direct by gas-shell.<sup>2</sup> Wherever the slowly-moving columns were locally dislocated by such incidents, and excitement or haste occurred, men tended to be gassed by the steady shower of shell, and fell out by the way, retching and collapsed.<sup>3</sup>

The four parallel tracks marked through the wood were not far apart, and at one point part of a left-flank battalion (40th) was wrongly guided on to a right-flank route. But the mistake was discovered and corrected. In these extreme difficulties officers and N.C.O's—conspicuous among them Captains McVilly<sup>4</sup> (40th), Grieve<sup>5</sup> (37th), Lieutenant Stubbs<sup>6</sup> (37th), and also Sergeant Bowring<sup>7</sup> (40th), himself badly shaken—worked vehemently to set going the interrupted march. The battalions on the three western tracks—that is, the 10th Brigade and the left half of the 9th—suffered most severely; several trench-mortar and machine-gun crews were killed, wounded, or gassed; the track of the 39th Battalion (10th Brigade) through "Bunhill Row" and "Mud Lane" was strewn with officers and men who had collapsed in the effort to keep the movement going. On the eastern route Major White<sup>8</sup> (33rd), finding his way barred by the blockage of a communication avenue and other obstacles, led his company by another track through the wood. Captain Sorensen<sup>9</sup> (33rd), further north, took a similar step.

<sup>2</sup> For example, Lieutenant W. F. Robertson (Wangaratta, Vic.), a well loved officer of the 37th.

<sup>3</sup> The gas was reported to be partly phosgene with some chlorine, but largely lachrymatory. Most of the cases of gas poisoning at Messines were cured by a few days' rest.

<sup>4</sup> Capt C. L. McVilly, M.C.; 40th Bn. Commercial traveller; of Hobart, Tas., b. Hobart, 3 Aug., 1889.

<sup>5</sup> Capt R. C. Grieve, V.C.; 37th Bn. Warehouseman; of Brighton, Vic., b. Brighton, 19 June, 1889.

<sup>6</sup> Capt. R. V. J. Stubbs, 37th Bn. Accountant, of Shepparton, Vic.; b. Shepparton, 23 Oct., 1883.

<sup>7</sup> Sgt. J. E. P. Bowring (No. 548, 40th Bn). Draper, of Latrobe, Tas.; b. Hawthorn, Vic., 1876. Killed in action, 7 June, 1917.

<sup>8</sup> Lieut.-Col. H. F. White, C.M.G., D.S.O. Commanded 35th Bn., 1918/19. Pastoralist, of Guyra, N.S.W., b. Armidale, N.S.W. 13 June, 1883.

<sup>9</sup> Major S. F. Sorensen, 33rd Bn. Member of Aust. Permanent Forces, of Haberfield, N.S.W.; b. Ribe, Denmark, 21 March, 1875.

Throughout the night the saving factor was the determination of the men themselves to reach the "jumping-off" position in time. The result of their efforts was that—although at 2 a.m., when the tails of the four columns should have been deploying for the attack, their heads were only just working out of the wood—the troops soon afterwards began to get clear of its edges into fresher air. The northern columns reaching Hill 63 came out into a practically clear atmosphere and with intense relief the men took off their masks. Some were half-exhausted, but on reaching their assembly trenches—mostly parts of the existing front-line system—they took a long drink of the water which had been specially stored there, and lay down and many immediately fell asleep. At least 500 men,<sup>10</sup> most of them gassed, had been put out of action in the wood, and others had temporarily lost their direction. Twenty minutes before zero-time only 120 of the 360 men who were to carry out the assault in the sector of the 39th Battalion<sup>11</sup> had reached their assembly trenches north of "Anton's Farm." The officer in charge, Major Tucker,<sup>12</sup> was gassed, but Captain Paterson<sup>13</sup> reorganised the battalion in a single wave, so that, despite its reduced numbers, it would cover its full front. Of the parties of the 40th to attack north of the Douve, one was reduced to an officer and one man, and others were nearly as short. Nevertheless the organisation for the attack remained. It is telling evidence of the training and spirit of this comparatively untried division that, during the forty minutes before "zero" hour, its eight battalions, after the nightmare of that approach, emerged to their proper assembly positions and with their organisation and efficiency for attack practically unimpaired.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Some estimates put the number as high as 1,000.

<sup>11</sup> One company of the 39th was held back as 10th Brigade reserve, and one platoon as battalion reserve.

<sup>12</sup> Lieut.-Col. S. E. Tucker, 39th Bn. Masseur; of Ballarat, Vic; b. Ballarat, 18 Apr., 1878.

<sup>13</sup> Lieut.-Col. A. T. Paterson, D.S.O., M.C., V.D. Commanded 39th Bn., 1918/19. Insurance broker; of East Malvern, Vic.; b. Footscray, Vic., 26 Sept., 1886.

<sup>14</sup> The admirable persistence of numbers of the gassed men is shown by numerous instances. Private J. D. Jeffrey (Lower Barrington, Tas.), 40th Battalion, who became unconscious and was carried to the advanced dressing station and told to remain quiet, went to the front line at noon carrying ten Lewis gun magazines. He carried two wounded men to the dressing station. When wounded next day, he refused to leave, saying that he could still carry ammunition. Lance-Corporal F. J. Cunningham (Dunorlan, Tas.), 40th Battalion, though he collapsed through gas before the start, led his men to the objective; he collapsed again, but stayed on until wounded at 5 p.m. He was killed in action on 13th Oct., 1917. Private W. G. Gale (Elliott, Tas.), also of the 40th, after collapse carried messages until he fainted.

The rain of gas-shells that descended all night long south of Hill 63<sup>15</sup> might indicate that the enemy knew the date of the attack, or it might signify merely an attempt to harass the general preparations. Artillery and other observers on the hill watched all night long the Messines Ridge opposite, black and lifeless under the bright moon.<sup>16</sup> Occasionally, in the valley between, a trail of sparks soared to burst into a white flare, which gracefully fell, the only sign that a German garrison existed. The assembling troops were not likely to be seen by the enemy, or the tanks heard, until about 2 o'clock when both would be nearing the front. At 2.10 a white parachute flare floated high over the southern flank and an aeroplane was heard overhead—British onlookers were expecting it and knew that its presence was solely intended to drown the noise of the approaching tanks.

Still the enemy gave no sign of alarm. In an hour's time the great mines beneath him would be exploded. At 2.52 in the distance, behind the northern rim of the ridge,<sup>17</sup> green and yellow flares, German calls for artillery-fire, went up, and within five minutes a barrage had broken out there. The gas-shelling in the south immediately stopped, but presently continued. At 3.5 the first tinge of dawn appeared over Messines,<sup>18</sup> and an Australian observer noted:

Last 5 minutes. Things must be right now. One feels as if it were a won battle.

A minute later from the valley immediately in front of the New Zealanders a flare burst into two green stars. A machine-gun broke out; then another. A second green flare followed. A rifle flashed. It seemed certain that the New Zealanders, some of whose assembly trenches had been dug in No-Man's Land, had been detected. But the two machine-guns, after chattering for three minutes, fell silent. At 3.9 there was unbroken silence. At 3.10 a number of big guns began to fire and then the trench-walls rocked; to the left, near Wyttschaete, a huge bubble was swelling, mushroom-shaped, from the earth, and then burst to cast a molten, rosy glow on the under-surface of some dense cloud low above it.

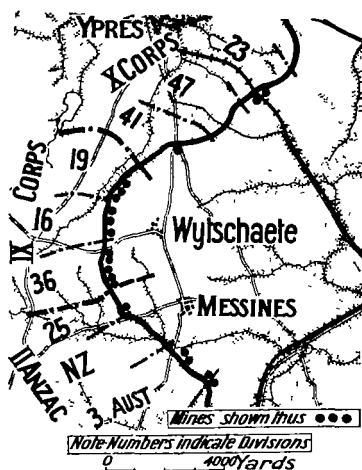
<sup>15</sup> The edge of this shower extended to the New Zealand reserves on the northern slope of the hill

<sup>16</sup> The moon, just past the full, rose at 10.20 p.m. and shone all night.

<sup>17</sup> Probably on the southern side of the Ypres Salient, six miles away.

<sup>18</sup> The sun would rise at 4.41.

As its brilliance faded two more bubbles burst beside it. During twenty seconds the same thing happened again and again, from the right to the far left. The nineteen great mines<sup>19</sup> had been exploded. With a roar the machine-gun barrage broke out. The massed artillery was already firing. The ridge faded from view, and for two hours nothing could be seen of it from Hill 63 through a fog of smoke and dust.



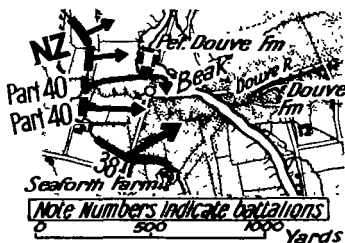
When the mines went up, the last companies of both brigades of the 3rd Australian Division were just reaching their assembly positions. In the 10th Brigade these were companies for the afternoon attack, but in the 9th they formed part of the main assaulting force. Major White, commanding the extreme right-flank company of the 33rd, had just seen his last man into position; Captain Douglas<sup>20</sup> with the support company was just arriving. Both led their men straight on across No-Man's Land. The mine explosions and the tremendous barrage—whose churning dust-cloud on that dry day served as a perfect screen and had a strong moral effect on the enemy—caused this great assault in its early stages to be easier than any in which Australians had been involved. The local German garrison, already overstrained by the week's bombardment, was entirely unstrung. Even some of the Australians closest to the mines suffered a momentary scare—these mines were fired seven seconds before they were expected, and so great was the shock that for an instant men thought the enemy must have obtained word of the operation and exploded a mine of his own.

<sup>19</sup> The other four near Le Pélerin (The Birdcage), south of the front of attack, were not fired.

<sup>20</sup> Lieut.-Col. W. H. Douglas, V.D.; 33rd Bn. Engineer; of Rockdale, N.S.W.; b. Leichhardt, N.S.W., 10 Aug., 1895.

The mines blew vast craters,<sup>21</sup> as much as 300 feet in width and 50 to 70 in depth, and each shattered or buried beneath its heaped-up rim the garrison of some 150 yards of trench. At three points on the 3rd Australian Division's mile-long front<sup>22</sup> lay the huge resultant ant-heaps and saucers, splitting the advance in those parts of the front.<sup>23</sup> The dust haze caused by them and by the churning fog of the British barrage increased the difficulty of keeping direction and organisation, and in some sectors successive waves and lines became amalgamated as one dense wave.

But enemy resistance was almost absent. Although much the greater part of the German front-line garrison was outside the physical danger-zone of the mines, the moral shock was naturally terrific. The Australians, stumbling into the German trenches, still recognisable in the shell-torn ground, found a sprinkling of the enemy cowering there, mostly in the numerous rectangular concrete shelters which had formerly lain beneath the parapets but had been partly unearched by the bombardment. A few Germans were in shell-holes in No-Man's Land, and a larger number behind their line, having lain there for several days to escape the shells. Many others had fled, a litter of accoutrements, rifles, ammunition, cigars, and scraps of food in the shell-holes showing where their line had been. At the "Beak," a small salient immediately north of the Douve stream, some German machine-gunner, despite the shocks of mines and the barrage and the panic around him, had remained true to the tradition of his splendid corps, and kept his head sufficiently to open fire on the Tasmanians advancing with their bridges. But Lieutenant Crosby<sup>24</sup> and six men ran round and without the



<sup>21</sup> See Vol. XII, plates 328, 329.

<sup>22</sup> The fourth mine in this sector lay, as already explained, 200 yards south of the southern flank of the attack.

<sup>23</sup> Several commanders afterwards expressed the opinion that the difficulties created by the mines outweighed the advantages.

<sup>24</sup> Lieut W. T. Crosby, 40th Bn. Bank clerk, of Hobart, Tas. b Campbell Town, Tas., 1 March, 1897.



least difficulty bombed the position from behind, whereupon the gunner's determination gave way. Elsewhere, after firing a few scattered shots,<sup>25</sup> the Germans surrendered as the troops approached. Men went along the trenches bombing the shelters, whose occupants then came out, some of them cringing like beaten animals. They "made many fruitless attempts to embrace us," reported Lieutenant Garrard<sup>26</sup> of the 40th. "I have never seen men so demoralised."

Except for a short tussle, presently to be described, on the extreme right, the German front and support lines were easily passed, the task proving child's play compared with the nightmare of the approach march. At this stage in each brigade, 9th and 10th, the left battalion halted to let a supporting battalion pass through,<sup>27</sup> and this, together with the right battalion of its brigade, then continued the advance to the position for the second halt. On the left the 38th had crossed the bridges that had been duly laid across the Douve by the 40th,<sup>28</sup> although this precaution was found to be needless, the stream proving easily fordable at any point. The tail of the supporting battalions was well clear of the old British line before the German barrage fell; but indeed the German artillery-fire at this stage was almost everywhere negligible. On the opening of the British barrage the rain of gas-shells had instantly stopped, and during the first stage of the battle the German field-guns



*Dotted line shows approximate position of troops forming up for second phase*

<sup>25</sup> In the sector of the 33rd Battalion on the extreme right a few Germans fought. Private John Carroll (Kurrawang and Kalgoorlie, W. Aust.) rescued a comrade from them, and captured a machine-gun after killing its crew. For this, and for his subsequent bravery during the German bombardments, he was awarded the Victoria Cross.

<sup>26</sup> Lieut. W. L. Garrard, M.C., 40th Bn. Schoolmaster; of Launceston, Tas., b. Launceston, 27 June, 1883.

<sup>27</sup> The 35th and 40th halted, and the 34th and 38th passed through and went on with the 33rd and 39th respectively, as shown in the marginal sketch.

<sup>28</sup> The 38th also carried six bridges of its own, and placed four of them in position. A platoon of the 40th under Sergeant L. K. Swann (Keyneton, S. Aust.; killed in 1918 as an officer of the A.F.C.) remained in the old German front line to keep the bridges in order.

did not seem to open again. Some fire from medium and heavy howitzers quickly descended on a few important points in the old British line, and almost the only casualties from shell-fire at this stage were suffered by the 37th Battalion, waiting there for the afternoon attack.

For the troops, following the dust cloud lit up by the lurid flashes of that tremendous barrage, it was almost difficult to realise that danger from the enemy could be present.

\* Kindly convey to the artillery and machine-guns (wrote Captain Chisholm<sup>29</sup> of the 40th to his colonel) our hearty appreciation of their magnificent barrages. Some of our men kept within twenty yards of it, and I had to order them back in some cases.

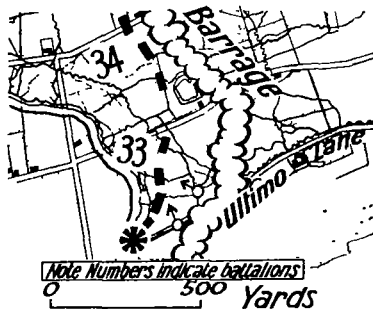
In some units indeed most of the casualties at this stage were caused by men pressing forward too eagerly and coming under their own shells. But so well did officers and men know their tasks that, in spite of some disorganisation, and whether they went forward in waves or as a crowd, they made their way to their proper objectives. In some cases they were sorted out and re-formed as they advanced. As the light increased, the tawny, rolling cloud was easier to follow. Without the slightest check the line reached the position of the second halt, where, close in front of the German second line, the Australians must wait for slightly over an hour while the New Zealand centre worked through Messines.<sup>30</sup>

So far the only point at which resistance worthy of the name had been felt was, as had been expected, on the extreme right. The 33rd Battalion, an especially fine unit commanded by a young veteran of Gallipoli, Lieutenant-Colonel Morshead, had been picked for this position, and its advancing troops were from the first under the fire of distant Germans, who took long shots at them from safe trenches many hundred yards beyond the flank. Almost immediately also a party of the enemy at a local headquarters in the support trench, just beyond the edge of the attack but closer than the barrage, turned a machine-gun upon the nearest men of the 33rd as they were "mopping-up." Three were hit, but another, Private

<sup>29</sup> Col. J. D. W. Chisholm, V.D.; 40th Bn. Accountant; of Hobart, Tas.; b. Forcett, Tas., 5 March, 1873.

<sup>30</sup> As in many other fights, troops charged with attacking the first line did not always stay on their proper objective, and, when the 38th took "Schnitzel Farm" close in front of this second line, some of the 40th, who should have been back near the German support line, were with them and spent hours vainly endeavouring to free the entrances of a big concrete blockhouse near by.

Spence,<sup>31</sup> obtained the help of four additional men, and, setting two to fire on the machine-gun with rifle-grenades, worked round behind it, killed the crew, and captured the gun. Still farther to the right, where the flank rested on the northernmost of the two great flanking mine-craters, another German machine-gun presently opened from a concrete shelter 100 yards up a communication trench, "Ultimo Lane,"<sup>32</sup> whose end was obliterated by the crater. Its fire had to be kept under by sniping until 4 a.m., when a Stokes mortar of the 9th Light Trench Mortar Battery with twelve shots drove these Germans again to shelter.



Not only the men digging the new front line on the right, but those at work a few hundred yards back on the new support line across the old No-Man's Land, and carriers coming up with supplies, came under heavy fire from Germans beyond this flank. There was especial danger that the Germans might occupy the southern of the two flank craters which lay 150 yards within their territory. The northern crater had a good command, but was so exposed to fire that the platoon told off to fortify it was quickly shot down, and the work had to be postponed until nightfall. The southern crater was too close for safe shooting by the artillery. Major White of the flank company had therefore to trust mainly to his snipers, who—chief among them one named Partridge<sup>33</sup>—prevented almost all enemy movement in that corner. After half-a-dozen Germans had been shot trying to creep to the southern crater, the enemy abandoned the attempt.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Pte (T/Cpl.) J. Spence, D.C.M. (No. 1244; 33rd Bn.). Labourer; of Tamworth district, N.S.W.; b. Niangala, N.S.W., 13 June, 1886.

<sup>32</sup> On the British maps the German trenches opposite a great part of the Second Army's front were given names commencing with the letter denoting the map square in which they lay. Thus, for 6,000 yards south and east of Messines all names began with "U." For the same distance north and east they began with "O."

<sup>33</sup> L/Cpl H. H. Partridge (No. 1232; 33rd Bn.). Farmer, of Niangala, N.S.W.; b. Niangala, 1890.

<sup>34</sup> The Australian flank rested on the headquarters captured by Private Spence, which afforded a good look-out and was held as a listening-post, with a hidden machine-gun emplaced near by.

Thus the first stage of the 3rd Division's advance was complete. Its right settled to the task of fortification; on the left, while the dawn broke and the countryside gradually became visible, the troops waited for the second stage.

The veil must now be lifted from the German side of the operations. The front on which this offensive fell had long been held by parts of two German army corps, the XIX (Wytschaete Group) north of the Douve, and the II Bavarian (Lille Group) south of it. The northern corps belonged to the Fourth German Army, which held the Ypres front, and the southern, until lately, to the Sixth Army—the same that fought at Arras. From the Battle of the Somme, in 1916, until April 1917 the XIX Corps had held its portion of the threatened front with three divisions, and the II Bavarian with part of one.

It is now known that as early as January, 1917, the Germans detected signs of a coming attack against the Messines salient. In February they remarked British batteries in new positions. When the Battle of Arras broke out, the German commander of this group of armies (Crown Prince Rupprecht) regarded a side-stroke against Messines as a possible accompaniment, and the anticipation caused him anxiety, since it would be difficult to find reserves to meet both attacks. The staff of the Fourth German Army, however, on inquiry being made of it, stated that the British seemed to be preparing not for an early attack, but possibly for a later offensive. Subsequently, reports of air-patrols in the bright weather about April 25 indicated that the British system of roads and railways opposite Messines was even more extensive than that prepared for the Arras offensive, and Crown Prince Rupprecht on April 27 rightly concluded that the British would be in a position to attack there as soon as they could spare the troops. But he believed that, so long as they continued to thrust at Arras, they would not have men enough to attack Messines.

The question, therefore, which had exercised the minds of German commanders responsible for the Messines front was—did the British seriously intend to break through at Arras? On April 29 a spy sent information that, in the event of the British forces being unable to break through at Arras, the British command intended to transfer its offensive within a fortnight to Flanders. This report, which indeed was very near the truth, deeply impressed the German High Command; and, although Crown Prince Rupprecht, and the subordinate staffs of the Fourth Army and II Bavarian Corps, retained some doubts until the intense bombardment at Messines had actually begun, Ludendorff on April 29 ordered that the necessary measures for preventing a breakthrough there must be taken. The 24th Division was accordingly inserted in the front north of Wytschaete, and the 3rd Bavarian Division, which had lost over 2,000 men at Arras, was brought up in rear of the southern end of the salient to act as counter-attack division. At the same time, for the sake of unity of control, the Lille Group (II Bavarian Corps) was placed under the Fourth Army, and its northernmost division, the 4th Bavarian, closed up to the north so as to strengthen the garrison south of the Douve.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>35</sup> The 16th Bavarian Division took over part of the 4th Division's front north of the Lys.

A much bolder precaution was suggested by Crown Prince Rupprecht's chief-of-staff, Lieutenant-Général von Kuhl. Till now preparations for attack had chiefly been detected north-west and west of the Messines salient. Now they began to be suspected also south of it—that is, in the II Anzac sector. To the apprehensions of Crown Prince Rupprecht that Wytschaete might be cut off by a blow from this direction, General von Kuhl replied with the suggestion: "Then evacuate the salient and withdraw behind the Lys." His chief was attracted by it; but two conferences with the subordinate commanders showed that all of them were strongly opposed to the suggested course. None of them believed the attack to be immediately impending; all thought that the Messines-Wytschaete ridge, with its fine command of the country around, could be held; and all disliked the notion of falling back on the Oosttaverne Line—a position overlooked from the ridge and itself commanding no view. Von Kuhl did not himself attach much importance to so-called "commanding" positions. In this war they frequently proved vulnerable; low-lying positions were often more secure. But the opinions of the two corps commanders held. General von Stetten of the II Bavarian Corps maintained that his position on the south of the salient favoured counter-attack. He could take the British artillery on his front under flanking fire, and suppress it with gas-shells.

Thus, the one step that Haig feared was rejected. Crown Prince Rupprecht, misled by reports from corps commanders at Arras and Bullecourt, who were afraid of losing part of their artillery, did not quickly detect the northward movement of troops and guns from Arras on about May 15,<sup>36</sup> and, when a fortnight later the Messines bombardment began, it was too late to think of withdrawal there. The system of tenure in depth also had to go by the board. The front line and the two strong-points of Messines and Wytschaete were to be held at all costs.<sup>37</sup> "These strong-points," said an order of the XIX Army Corps on June 1, "must not fall even temporarily into the enemy's hands. . . . They must be held to the last man even if the enemy has taken them off on both sides and threatens them from the rear."

The German command, therefore, was for more than five weeks sufficiently aware of the danger to induce it to make preparations. It was totally unaware, however, of the existence of the great mines. It knew that the British had once tunnelled at certain points, but the German miners in most of those places had long since reported that active mining had been abandoned. At Hill 60, where the British miners were known to be still aggressive, the German officer in charge claimed that his men had them beaten.<sup>38</sup> Thus, although the vast labour expended on the British mines could have been rendered useless by a slight withdrawal, this reason for retirement does not seem to have been suggested. The capacity of the British miners was disastrously underrated.

From more than one British soldier captured at the end of May the Germans received information, accurate to within a few days, of the

<sup>36</sup> On May 17 he noted that "everything evidenced" a probable continuance of the Arras attack; and, on May 25, that neither against the Arras nor against the Quéant Group did British artillery seem to have decreased. By May 13 the German staff received from a spy in Paris an accurate outline of some of the chief decisions of the Paris conference on May 4. But such reports had often proved to be wrong, and it was impossible correctly to sift the false from the true.

<sup>37</sup> Orders of the 40th Division and other formations to this effect were captured

<sup>38</sup> See p. 954

date of the attack; one, captured on May 29, said that it would take place on June 7 after eight days' bombardment.<sup>39</sup> The German artillery, especially on the flanks, was strengthened and forthwith began its counter-operations. The British feint-barrages, although they failed to give the impression of an actual attack, may have made the operation appear imminent, for on June 3 the Fourth German Army anticipated that it would be attacked next morning, and General von Stetten's plan was therefore put into operation: to suppress the British batteries, 13,000 gas-shells were poured into Ploegsteert Wood that night. On June 6, in accurate anticipation of attack next day, this step was repeated, heavy *minenwerfer* throwing in addition 620 huge gas-bombs into the wood. Yet this prearranged measure entirely failed to dislocate either the programme of the British artillery or the approach march of the 3rd Australian Division.

The German artillery staffs must by that time have realised, even if the higher commanders did not, that the power of their opponents had been under-estimated. There had been concentrated on their front a mass of artillery and air force against which their corresponding units were almost powerless. In answer to the Fourth Army's appeal, more artillery, air force, pioneers, and machine-guns were being brought up, but its batteries were being alarmingly overwhelmed. Many British observers<sup>40</sup> during those days received the impression that the German artillery was withdrawing to safer positions. It is now known that this was not so—its comparative silence was due to another cause. Under the concentration of British counter-battery fire, directed by airmen, the German artillery, especially the central part of it, thrust forward into the Messines salient, was crumbling. Half of its heavy howitzers behind that front, a third of its medium and light howitzers, a fifth of its field-guns, and practically all the captured Russian guns in use there, were destroyed. In the sector of the 3rd Bavarian Division there were by June 7 only 7 heavy and 12 field-pieces ready for use.<sup>41</sup> Farther north, of 18 heavy and medium howitzers, the 2nd Division had only 3 in action. The artillery on the flanks, however, was in much better condition.

The support that this artillery could give to its infantry, especially in the centre, was negligible. Its answer to the British, according to the historian of the 18th Bavarian I.R., "made a pitiful impression." The British barrage, on the other hand, prevented the German supply staff from bringing forward any except cold food, and the troops received too little of that. On the night of June 6 a lucky British shell set fire to a great ammunition dump at Coucou, near Menin.<sup>42</sup> The gassing

<sup>39</sup> At the time of this statement, the orders were for five days' bombardment. Such information was given to the enemy sometimes in replies to direct examination, sometimes through unwise conversation between prisoners who did not realise that they were overheard.

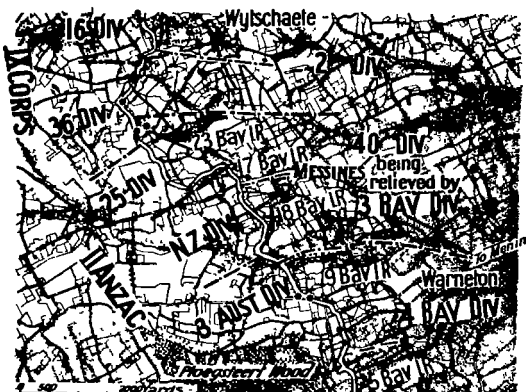
<sup>40</sup> And also the German infantry, as the statements of prisoners showed.

<sup>41</sup> Report of General von Wenninger, quoted by Crown Prince Rupprecht, *Mein Kriegstagebuch*, Vol. III, p. 169. It is strange that the high command seems to have been unaware of the destruction of German artillery until after the attack.

<sup>42</sup> The gas from the exploded shells of this dump drifted to Menin and caused many deaths among the civil population which then still inhabited that village (*History of the 204th German Infantry Division*, p. 42). The shelling of Comines, lately, had become so severe that even the surrounding huts and parade grounds had to be avoided by the troops, and "the friendly inhabitants" (who, according to the *History of the 18th Bav I.R.*, "for more than two years shared joy and adversity with the German garrison") were forced to leave.

of the low-lying areas during the last nights of the bombardment had its intended effect of robbing the German headquarters, artillery, and reserves in those areas of their sleep.<sup>43</sup> The strong-point in Messines, from which so much was hoped, proved such a shell-trap<sup>44</sup> that one of the two companies of the 18th Bavarian I.R. stationed there had to be shifted to trenches in the open. "In the firing line," says the regimental historian, "the fire was supportable, since there the dugouts (concrete chambers) gave some shelter." Early in the bombardment the 24th Division north of Wyttschaete had to be replaced by the 35th, and by June 4 the 40th (Saxon) Division, holding Messines, also reached the limit of its endurance. It was accordingly relieved by the 3rd Bavarian, which for a month had been practising the rôle of counter-attack division. This relief north of the Douve was in its final stages when the attack began. South of the Douve the 4th Bavarian Division had on the nights of June 3 and 4 relieved its right flank regiment, the 5th Bav. R.I.R., by the 9th Bav. I.R.

The physical destruction caused by the mines is naturally exaggerated in German accounts; but, together with the barrage, they would have caused a panic in any army. The 3rd Bavarian Division was just finishing the relief of the 40th (Saxon). Its 17th and 18th Regiments, holding the Messines-North and Messines-South sectors respectively, each had one battalion in the firing line, one in the second-line area on the ridge, and one in and behind the Oosttaverne Line; its 23rd Regiment held the next sector on the north, opposite the IX British Corps.<sup>45</sup> In each sector numerous machine-gun posts were scattered, chess-board fashion, over the ground behind the trenches.<sup>46</sup> The 9th Bavarian I.R. (4th Bav. Division) south of the Douve was somewhat similarly disposed, its support battalion lying in the Oosttaverne Line (which was there much closer to the front) and half the reserve battalion in rear near Warneton. The other half lay on the Douve to act as a special "contact detachment" to keep touch between the flanks of the two divisions.



<sup>43</sup> By forcing them to put on their gas-masks. If a man neglected to do this, three or four breaths of gas might be fatal.

<sup>44</sup> For example, at midday on June 6 a heavy shell burst in the cellar of Messines monastery, killing 2 medical officers of the 18th Bav. I.R. and 8 stretcher-bearers.

<sup>45</sup> In the sector of that regiment, apparently, lay the Spanbroekmolen and Kruisstraat Cabaret mines—four in all.

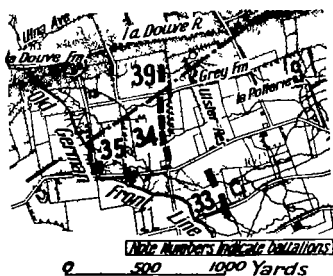
<sup>46</sup> This was part of the practice, enjoyed by the high command, of holding the line "in depth." In the sector of the 18th Bav. I.R. were 34 such machine-gun "nests."

German accounts state that, at the first stroke, the three front-line battalions—and, in the sector of the 17th, half of the support battalion also—were shattered.<sup>47</sup>

When at 5.3 the long halt ended the sun was already up. The Germans had evidently regained some sort of organisation, and opposition was immediately felt at certain points.

**The Second stage** The New Zealanders could be seen passing round the edge of Messines; their central battalions had fought through the village and established themselves beyond it, despite the fact that one or two groups of the enemy were still firing from concrete shelters or cellars.

In this stage of the action the 10th (Victoria) Brigade of the 3rd Division continued its attack up the southern shoulder of Messines ridge, north of the Douve, with its 39th Battalion still advancing immediately south of the Douve. The 9th Brigade, pushing forward along the top of the low rise south of the stream, expected strong opposition at one point, the ruins of "Grey Farm"<sup>48</sup> in the German second line. This ruin, a few low piles of bricks splashed with white mortar dust, was known to contain German shelters. It lay immediately behind the front trench of the second line ("Ulster Reserve") and was screened by a thin hedge. During the hour's pause the company commanders of the 34th Battalion, which had passed through the 35th to assemble for this attack, were able to check precisely the position of their men, and, while the barrage still lay on the second line and the farm, their troops pushed forward close to their own shell-bursts.



The officers knew by their watches the moment when the barrage would lift from these places, and the lift, which

<sup>47</sup> The regimental histories naturally imply that they were destroyed by the mines. The "Ontario Farm" mine apparently caught the I/17th Bav. I.R., just as it was being relieved from the front line by its sister, the II/17th, and half the relieved troops as well as those relieving are said by the regimental historian to have been "as good as annihilated" by the explosion. No mine, however, exploded in the sector of the 18th Bav. I.R., which had 6 officers and 392 men missing and lost 16 machine-guns. The III/9th Bav. I.R. had four mines in its sector.

<sup>48</sup> See Vol XII, plate 333.



occurred punctually, was instantly recognised. The 34th—and, on its left, the 39th, now reduced to about 100 under Captain Paterson, but still occupying the full battalion front in the valley—advanced; but, as the 34th reached the hedge, machine-gun fire was already streaming through it from undetected positions close beyond. Presently the troops located one of the guns, and some of them crept forward along a ditch, and through the hedge towards it. One of the two Germans working it was shot by Private Gray;<sup>49</sup> others lay dead about the gun, and the last gunner surrendered. The line worked forward and, after some fighting, the crews of the other machine-guns were shot down or bolted, with the troops firing at them as they ran.<sup>50</sup> A few were found in a shelter with steel doors, and were killed. Four machine-guns were captured, two in the trench and two in the farm, as well as an automatic “pom-pom” gun. The 39th attacking the defences immediately north of Grey Farm had also been met by the fire of a machine-gun emplaced on the roof of a concrete shelter. This forced the troops in that area to ground, and for a time the check seemed likely to become dangerous. In this crisis Captain Paterson himself managed to suppress with a rifle the fire of the machine-gun, and, during its silence, rushed forward with the men nearest to him, and seized the post, capturing two machine-guns.<sup>51</sup> The 34th and 39th dug in on their final objective, 100 yards beyond the alignment of Grey Farm; 500 yards ahead, beyond a slight dip of the plateau, lay the Oosttaverne Line.

On this side of the Douve the Oosttaverne Line was not to be attacked. It was from this line, therefore, that a counter-attack in that sector was expected to come. Everyone knew that the new German system of defence depended upon powerful early counter-attacks, and, when once the final objective had been reached, the troops concentrated their efforts upon digging in before the counter-attack came. At

<sup>49</sup> Pte. M. Gray, D.C.M. (No. 77; 34th Bn.). Miner; of Greta, N.S.W., and East Wemyss, Fife, Scotland; b. Gallatown, Fife, 28 March, 1881. Killed in action, 12 Oct., 1917.

<sup>50</sup> Sgt. W. H. Wilkinson (East Greta, N.S.W.; killed in action two days later) shot two of these machine-gunners and captured their gun. It is recorded that Private H. R. Sternbeck (Glen William, N.S.W.), 35th Battalion, at some point of the advance did the same. Sternbeck was only 16 at the time, having enlisted at the age of 15½ years.

<sup>51</sup> Lieut. Palstra also was active in the operations at this post. (Lieut. W. Palstra, M.C. Accountant; of Northcote and Surrey Hills, Vic.; b. Zwolle, Holland, 8 Oct., 1891. Afterwards joined No. 3 Squadron, Aust. Flying Corps. He was killed in the wreck of the British airship R.101, 5 Oct., 1930.)

Grey Farm for half-an-hour this work was entirely undisturbed. The troops made use of shell-holes and old trenches, and at 5.35 Captain Stewart,<sup>52</sup> whose company had taken the farm, reported that his men had now pretty good cover. To deal with German snipers who had just begun to fire from the direction of the Oosttaverne Line, he placed snipers of his company out in front. An hour later, about 6.30, three machine-guns opened from the Oosttaverne Line immediately north of the "Potterie Farm." They were seen to be firing from the top of the concrete shelter, and upon their position being reported the heavy artillery fired on the place and for the time being suppressed them. About this time five or six enterprising men of the 34th, "prospecting" on their own account, made their way through ditches into the Oosttaverne Line at the Potterie, although a slow British barrage was on it, and bombed several shelters there. The trench could easily have been taken, had this been in the plan: as it was, the prospectors, having thrown their bombs, withdrew, and shortly afterwards German reserves were seen moving into the place.

The advance of the 10th Brigade also, north of the Douve, had met opposition at a point where it was expected, near Bethléem Farm. Here during the long halt the second and third waves<sup>53</sup> of the 38th Battalion had formed up immediately facing the second German line ("Ungodly Trench"), their task being to capture this and Bethléem Farm, whose ruins, surrounded by several tree-lined hedgerows,<sup>54</sup> lay 300 yards beyond. The second wave, under Captain Trebilcock,<sup>55</sup> would move straight on to Bethléem Farm and the Black Line, the third under Captain Fairweather<sup>56</sup> following to mop up and form a strong-point in the Douve valley. The few Germans in Ungodly Trench ran back a little way and settled in shell-holes beyond a hedge. As Fairweather's company approached, they opened fire, covered by a machine-gun shooting from

<sup>52</sup> Major R. J. Stewart, M.C.; 34th Bn. Civil engineer; of Parkes, N.S.W.; b. Peak Hill, N.S.W., 11 April, 1894.

<sup>53</sup> Its first wave had already taken "Ulcer Reserve Trench" and "Schnitzel Farm." This wave was commanded by Major A. J. A. Maudsley; but, when he established the forward command post of the 38th, Captain E. W. Latchford took charge of the first wave troops.

<sup>54</sup> See Vol. XII, plate 332.

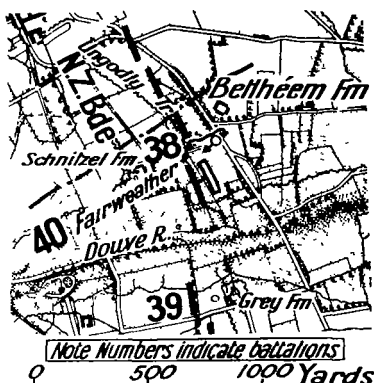
<sup>55</sup> Capt. R. E. Trebilcock, M.C.; 38th Bn. Solicitor; of Kerang, Vic.; b. Ballarat, Vic., 30 June, 1880.

<sup>56</sup> Capt. F. E. Fairweather, M.C.; 38th Bn. Accountant; of Rockhampton, Q'land and Heidelberg, Vic.; b. Moonee Ponds, Vic., 20 Sept., 1891. Killed in action 29 Sept., 1918.

some point which could not immediately be located. It held up the right, but to the left front was a hedge and row of trees lining a cart-track to the farm. Behind the trees lay a concrete shelter, and near this, beside the last tree in the avenue, Fairweather presently noticed a slight flurry of smoke.

It was the gun. Taking a sergeant and two signallers, he crept over some shell-holes to the hedge, scrambled through it, and ran forward behind it until he was in rear of the blockhouse. Half-a-dozen

men bolted as he got there. On a concrete emplacement beside the blockhouse stood the gun, steaming, with a belt of unexpended cartridges beside it. In the shelter a German officer and soldier were calling "Kamerad!" Fairweather and his companions, lifting the gun from its emplacement, fired it at the fugitives who sank into shell-holes 150 yards farther on. The



German infantry who had been holding up Fairweather's troops, and who had lost heavily through their rifle-fire, then began to run, and the Victorians pushed on through several hedges and across a road, and almost immediately came upon a German field-gun in a small hedged field. They shot two of its crew and captured the gun complete. A little beyond Bethéem Farm the troops captured another gun abandoned by a party of the enemy who had tried to drag it away.<sup>67</sup>

The 10th Brigade here reached its sector of the Black Line, the main defensive line to be held along the captured ridge.<sup>68</sup> Fairweather's company began to dig a strong-post

<sup>67</sup> Its sights were missing, but were presently found in the overcoat of a German who was shot in a shell-hole near by.

<sup>68</sup> On its right in the Douve valley the 38th went slightly farther than the line prescribed, Corporal A. E. Pegler's platoon pushing on to where the Messines-Basse Ville road crosses the stream by a small bridge. Here they shot a few Germans running up the road, and began to dig in. Fairweather afterwards stated that across the valley they could see machine-guns holding up the 39th near Grey Farm. Pegler (who belonged to Mildura, Vic.) accordingly worked forward, and, by firing from the flank, endeavoured to dislodge the gunners. Pegler's men, finding themselves afterwards on the line of their own barrage, fell back on the redoubt which their company was digging.

between Betlhéem Farm and the Douve, and Trebilcock's and Latchford's<sup>59</sup> a trench east of Betlhéem Farm joining that of the New Zealanders between "White Spot Cottages" and a small hedged field known as the "Zareeba." The line here chosen was slightly in advance of the intended position of the Black Line and connected with the New Zealand posts subsequently placed on the Black Dotted Line. From the German dump at Betlhéem the 38th obtained extra shovels and other stores and all the wire required for the work.

From German records it appears probable that the troops that opposed Fairweather were the two companies of the 9th Bavarian I.R. entrusted with keeping contact between the 3rd and 4th Bavarian Divisions. These were the first in the whole area to counter-attack. At the outbreak of the storm their leader, Captain Fuchsel, had advanced towards Betlhéem Farm, hoping to support the left flank of the 18th Bavarian I.R. The field-guns were two which had been dragged by their crews to near Fuchsel's position apparently in order to bring direct fire upon the Australians. The German account states that Fuchsel's force was outflanked by the advance on the north, and was almost wiped out.<sup>60</sup>

Thus, having quickly fought down slight opposition, the 3rd Division completed by 5.15, or soon afterwards, its part of the main phase of General Plumer's plan. The New Zealanders farther north were through and round Messines,<sup>61</sup> and the 25th Division was on the New Zealanders' flank with its left duly thrown back, to be swung up as the IX Corps came into the line. So far as the II Anzac Corps was concerned, the main objective of the offensive had been captured. The crest of the Messines Ridge had been seized, and the duty of the troops who captured it was now to entrench themselves so strongly that the enemy could not retake the ridge, no matter how vehement his efforts.

**The pause in the attack**

<sup>59</sup> Capt. E. W. Latchford, M.B.E., M.C., M.S.M.; 38th Bn. Member of Aust. Permanent Forces; of Ascot Vale and Armadale, Vic.; b. Goulburn Weir, Vic., 24 Jan., 1889.

<sup>60</sup> It is possible that part of the 4th company of the reserve battalion of the 18th Bav. I.R. from the Oosttaverne Line also took part in this counter-attack.

<sup>61</sup> It was in this advance of the New Zealanders that there occurred the only opportunity for action by tanks in this stage of the II Anzac attack. The pace of the New Zealanders' advance over the crater-field was too fast for the company of tanks allotted to assist; but one of two tanks which passed round the village was in time to help by knocking in the walls and roof of a farm close on the northern flank, from which fire was being directed on the New Zealanders as they dug in; 30 Germans at once came out of the place and surrendered.

The question of the time for the separate attack to be made in the afternoon—to capture most of the Oostaverne Line and the batteries supposed to lie west of it—had at the last moment, on June 6th, been reopened. That advance would now occur at 1.10 p.m., *or later*, the army commander withholding the decision as to the new “zero” hour until the progress of the main attack was known. But the afternoon operation was to be carried out by entirely different troops, and was purely subsidiary. The main object would have been fully attained when the Black Line was rendered impregnable.

In most battles the troops who took part were on the look-out for some display of the enemy's most recent and dreaded devices. At Pozières reports had been received of the formidable German “barrages” and plans were made (without much success) to avoid their dreaded effects. At Messines every man had heard of the new German system of counter-attacking, and all attention was concentrated on preparation to meet the expected blow. The urgency for these measures had become almost an obsession. Work on the Black Line, and on the support line behind it, was carried out with the particular care that was to become a recognised characteristic of the 3rd Australian—as it already was of the New Zealand—Division. In the 34th Battalion, for example, the sections (7 or 8 men) first dug their separate posts; next these trenches were linked into platoon posts; later the platoons of each company linked theirs. By 7.30 a.m. the sections had dug down to two-thirds of the necessary depth, and were linking up. By 9.30 only short gaps remained between the companies. Some 150 yards in rear was a support line<sup>62</sup> not quite so continuous, bent back on the right across the old No-Man's Land. The work on the communication trenches across the old No-Man's Land was rendered difficult and dangerous by the barrage of the German artillery, feeble though it was and laid down only by the heavier guns. The Russian sap on the extreme right, being on the southern slope and therefore exposed also to enemy rifles at 500 yards' range, or less, could not be opened by the pioneers and Canadian

<sup>62</sup> Behind the 34th Battalion this line was dug by the 35th. The 33rd dug its own support line. The 36th was carrying, its men being fitted for the purpose with carriers made from sandbags, a device invented by Sergeant-Major A. R. Horwood (Newcastle, N.S.W., and Melbourne).

tunnellers until after nightfall. On this flank any party of the "carrying" battalion, the 36th, which strayed to the right was liable to find itself under direct fire of German machine-guns at medium range.

From the blindness of the German heavy artillery-fire, it was evident that not until late in the morning was the enemy staff sure of the situation. The sky at dawn was seen to be swarming with British aircraft. One observer noted that he could see twenty-three. Near the II Anzac area only one German balloon was visible, and that was low down and distant, east of Messines. But about 6 o'clock a single German aeroplane managed to get through, flying low down over the right flank, and an hour later 5.9-inch shells began to arrive from some enfilading battery near Deulemont, a mile and a half from that flank. This fired only single shots, but was evidently directed by observers, and, continuing steadily day and night, is said to have been responsible for more than half the casualties on that flank.<sup>63</sup>

At 7 o'clock evidence of an impending counter-attack was detected along the 9th Brigade's front. The men of the 34th digging beyond Grey Farm saw, as already mentioned, troops moving northwards up the third German line ("Uncertain Trench") at Potterie Farm. Later, about 8.30, these were observed dribbling forward into the slight dip, 400 yards east of the 34th's new trench, where they were lost to view. The 33rd on the extreme right observed men flooding similarly into the area 300 yards south-east of the right flank. At Grey Farm Captain Stewart obtained the help of some of the 9th Brigade's Stokes mortars under Lieutenant Chapman.<sup>64</sup> On their bombs exploding in the dip, the Germans were seen to run back to the third line, the 34th shooting at their backs. The German movement had also been reported to the artillery by a forward observing officer, who at 8.38, judging this advance to be a definite counter-attack, asked for an S.O.S. barrage. Airmen also reported that between 7 and 8 o'clock German troops were massing on the roads near Warneton,

<sup>63</sup> Major White's headquarters, a concrete shelter in the old German firing-line, was hit, 3 signallers being killed and 2 wounded.

<sup>64</sup> Lieut. H. W. Chapman, 36th Bn. Bank manager, of Coogee, N.S.W.; b. Kiama, N.S.W., 29 Aug., 1887. Killed in action, 16 July, 1917.

a mile and a quarter to the east. The artillery and machine-guns opened on the artillery observer's call,<sup>66</sup> and all signs of counter-attack quickly ceased.

This movement was due to an attempt by half the support battalion of the 9th Bavarian I.R. in the Oostaverne Line, reinforced by the reserve half-battalion from near Warneton, to get into position to launch a counter-attack. The attempt, says the regimental historian, "broke up in strong enemy fire."<sup>66</sup>

By this time throughout the area behind the British line there was keen elation at the news that the whole attack was going successfully. At 6.35 II Anzac ordered the advance of certain batteries, previously selected for the purpose. At 8.20 cavalry, who were to patrol the far slope of the ridge for the IX Corps, were seen winding their way to the crest north of Messines. Although this and other attempts to employ mounted troops at such a stage was due to a groundless anticipation of open warfare, the spectacle increased the general cheerfulness. The divisions for the afternoon attack were marching along their roads towards the battlefield undisturbed by shell-fire. Shortly before 11 the two brigades of the 4th Australian Division destined for the afternoon attack reached the neighbourhood of the old British front in the valley below Messines, and the two attack-battalions of each, together with the carriers from their third battalions, moved to their assembly positions at the foot of Messines hill. The reserve battalions, taking up position in the old Subsidiary Line on the green slope of Hill 63, enjoyed such a spectacle as they had never known, looking out, as it were, from "gallery" seats upon the Messines Ridge opposite and on the whole scene: the aeroplanes wheeling and fighting in the brilliant sky; the German shells punching roan-coloured dust plumes from the ruins on the summit; lined-out working parties of New Zealanders furiously digging communication trenches up the slope;<sup>67</sup> the Australians for the afternoon attack lining up on their flags, which, like those on a football ground, marked with each battalion's colours the line on which

<sup>66</sup> The guns protected the 9th Brigade's front with an intense barrage for four minutes, and with a diminishing one until 9 o'clock.

<sup>66</sup> *History of the 9th Bav. I.R.*, p. 104. All German accounts dealing with this sector imply that the Potterie Farm section of Oostaverne Line was attacked this day, some even state that it was lost and recaptured. It was, of course, not attacked except by "prospectors" in search of souvenirs or adventure.

<sup>67</sup> It is recorded that one party, understood to be Maoris of the N.Z. Pioneers, in less than an hour's vehement effort dug themselves out of sight below the surface.

[illegible]

The black and black dotted lines had been captured, and in the II Anzac sector the assembly for the afternoon attack was beginning. The 13th and 13th Brigades (4th Division) were ready to move forward, and the 37th Battalion (3rd Division) was moving.



it was to assemble; tanks marshalling in the meadows; batteries of artillery racing up through the long grass, unlimbering, the teams trotting back with a jingle of chains, and the gun-crews later opening fire. The new starting-time for the afternoon attack was not yet known to the battalion headquarters; and as the original order, to attack at 1.10, was to stand good unless changed, the troops, if no word came, must at about 11.30 move to their forward assembly positions.

Their intelligence officers and scouts had long since gone over the ridge to tape out the actual jumping-off lines. Up there the New Zealanders, digging since 5.30 a.m. the Black Line beyond Messines, had looked out, through the now diminished barrage, over the green Flemish lowlands thickly screened with tree-lined hedgerows, with here and there a sign of some sheltered farmhouse, and, near the horizon, the twin spires of Comines and the more distant steeple of Menin. The scene at the Black Line, as an officer of the 37th Battalion<sup>68</sup> has stated, was at this stage "more like a picnic than a battle." Except for the bursts of the protective barrage in the foreground and on the Oostaverne Line, 1,000 yards down the slope, the landscape seemed to drowse under a bright sun that promised an exceptionally hot day. The ground on which the Australian scouts were to place their flags and tapes lay well down the slope ahead of the Black Line, in full view of the enemy but behind the posts of the Black Dotted Line.

The posts of the Black Dotted Line in the II Anzac sector were to be formed by parties of New Zealanders and of the 11th Battalion, Cheshire Regiment (25th Division), advancing under an increased barrage at 8.40. But, finding the foreground so peaceful and the protective barrage so light, one of the 4th Division's taping parties—Lieutenant Hallam<sup>69</sup> and 14 scouts of the 49th (Queensland) Battalion—did not wait for this advance, but went straight out beyond the Black Line to the 49th's jumping-off position, on which its own barrage then lay. There, behind a hedge, Hallam and his scouts found four abandoned field-guns, which they claimed for their battalion, and then they wandered on into "Despaigne Farm," 250 yards beyond, and found a 5.9-inch howitzer. At

<sup>68</sup> Capt. R. C. Grieve.

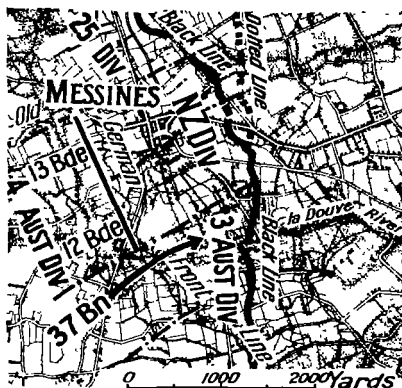
<sup>69</sup> Capt. F. Hallam, M.C.; 49th Bn. Draper; of South Brisbane; b. Carnforth, Lancs., Eng., 19 May, 1888.

this stage they bethought themselves of their return. But the barrage which they had ignored had suddenly become terribly dense, and was rolling down on them, covering the 8.40 advance. There was nothing to be done but to let it pass over them, which it did, killing 4 and wounding 5.

Nevertheless the tapes of the 49th were accurately laid. Farther south, near Huns' Walk, where the German line was much closer, the task had to be carried out under direct sniping-fire at moderate range, but the work was excellently done. In the sector of the 45th Battalion Lieutenant Murray<sup>70</sup> was shot through the head as he finished it.<sup>71</sup> On the northern flank Lieutenant York<sup>72</sup> of the 52nd was wounded as he made his way back to his battalion.

Meanwhile the four battalions of the 4th Division destined for the afternoon attack, and the 37th Battalion (3rd Division), which was to take its part on their right, had been waiting west of Messines Ridge for word as to the new hour for launching that assault, but at 11.30 no message had arrived. The 37th had already moved off down the Douve valley, and the right (12th) brigade of the 4th Division now also went forward, with its two battalions in eight waves, that is to say, in the precise order for their attack except that the sections moved in file until they topped the crest.<sup>73</sup>

It was just then that the character of the German shell-fire changed. For the second time a German aeroplane had succeeded in penetrating the guard kept by British airmen



<sup>70</sup> Lieut. R. A. M. Murray, M.C., 45th Bn. Medical student, son of a former commander in the Orient Line, of Wentworth Falls and Sydney, N.S.W.; b. Ryde, N.S.W., 11 Jan., 1893. Killed in action, 7 June, 1917.

<sup>71</sup> Corpl. C. H. Kelly (Eugowra, N.S.W.) carried on and guided the 45th to its tapes.

<sup>72</sup> Lieut. H. P. York, 52nd Bn. Electrician; of Waverley, N.S.W.; b. Sydney, 6 Oct., 1886.

<sup>73</sup> Each battalion had two companies in front and two in support. Each company advanced on a platoon front, its four successive platoons forming the waves. On crossing the crest, the sections shook out into line.

and made a survey of the right shoulder of Messines Ridge. The new trenches—Black Line, support line, and communications—and the troops at work on them, were evidently detected, for at about 11.30 most of the heavy German artillery on the southern flank ceased its hitherto scattered fire and laid a sharp barrage on the southern shoulder of the ridge, especially on the Black Line near Bethléem Farm. It is possible that the advance of the 12th Brigade round the southern edge of Messines was also observed. At all events, as the two battalions climbed the shell-pitted ridge they found themselves approaching the burst and dust-haze of a fairly fierce barrage. "I think most men were of the idea that we would not attempt to penetrate this," wrote a man of the 47th (Private Gallwey<sup>74</sup>) afterwards, but their officers led them straight through it. Shells stamped out one or two sections, especially in the carrying parties supplied by the 46th Battalion, which marched throughout at the tail of the attack; but the brigade passed through with surprisingly slight loss.

On cresting the ridge it came into sight of the lowlands beyond, and was immediately fired on by distant rifles and machine-guns, as well as by a few cannon. Close in front there ran forward the Messines-Korentje road (known as "Huns' Walk"), whose avenue of trees along the crest of an easterly finger of the ridge was the main feature of this landscape. On either side of this, beyond the digging New Zealanders, were the tapes and flags of the brigade's jumping-off line. As the troops were being led on to them, word arrived from the rear that the afternoon attack had been postponed for two hours and would take place at 3.10. For these two extra hours, therefore, the advanced troops must wait in sight of the enemy. They were ordered to lie down, still roughly in the order of their attack, in shell-holes, the front companies close in front of the main New Zealand line, some of the rear ones behind it. The enemy sprayed them with distant fire of small arms and shelled them, killing Captain Davy<sup>75</sup> of the 47th as he stood superintending his men. Lieutenant Campbell<sup>76</sup> and some of the waiting men

<sup>74</sup> Cpl. W. D. Gallwey (No. 2430; 47th Bn.). Bank clerk; of Brisbane; b. Brisbane, 28 March, 1898.

<sup>75</sup> Capt. F. L. Davy, 47th Bn. Farmer; of Hobart, Tas.; b. 20 March, 1887. Killed in action, 7 June, 1917.

<sup>76</sup> Lieut. F. F. Campbell, 47th Bn. Orchardist; of Cygnet, Tas.; b. Bognor, Sussex, Eng., 13 July, 1887. Killed in action, 7 June, 1917.

also were killed, and Lieutenant Goode<sup>77</sup> mortally wounded. Later some of the forward companies and the New Zealand posts beside them found themselves under fire of their own guns as well—an experience which, partly through great difficulties of communication, frequently recurred during this battle—and had to shift their position temporarily.<sup>78</sup> Many men, tired out by the heat of the march, slept until wakened for the attack. On the right the 37th Battalion (3rd Division) waited in rear of the Black Line. On the other flank the left attacking brigade of the 4th Division, the 13th, which was to advance by the north of Messines, had received notice of the new “zero” hour just in time to stop its advance from the first assembly position, and was accordingly held back there for two hours in comparative safety.

The two hours’ postponement of the afternoon’s attack had been decided upon by the commander of the Second Army (General Plumer) at about 10 o’clock on the strength of his information as to the progress of the operation. He had to consider not only the time necessary for the reserve division of the IX Corps to pass over the captured ground near Wytschaete and get into position for the attack, and for 40 field- and several heavy-batteries to take up their new positions to cover it, but also the progress of the attack on the flanks. Actually there had been a check on the northern flank, at the “Spoil Bank” on the Ypres-Comines canal, where the 47th Division had not penetrated as deeply as the others. This was not yet known, but the two hours’ delay was a safe course, and should enable the force for the afternoon advance to be assembled and launched without confusion. Word of the decision reached the several corps commanders between 10.15 and 10.40.

On the IX Corps front the afternoon attack was to be made by only one brigade (33rd) of the 11th Division.<sup>79</sup> This brigade had marched during the night to “Butterfly Farm” behind Mount Kemmel, three miles from the front line, where it came under control of the 16th Division. By

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<sup>77</sup> Lieut. G. N. M. Goode, 47th Bn. Grazier; of Orange, N.S.W., and Southport, Tas., b. Camden, N.S.W., 20 Dec., 1884. Died of wounds, 12 June, 1917.

<sup>78</sup> The result was a gap in the New Zealand Dotted Line.

<sup>79</sup> This was the division which had recently been employed under I Anzac south of Bullecourt.

no fault of the brigade, its orders to advance from there were not received until 10.45 a.m.—at which time the Australian battalions for the same attack were already about to form up in the old No-Man's Land. The two hours' postponement gave an opportunity for the 33rd—otherwise certain to be late—to reach in time its jumping-off line, five miles away. It was, however, ordered thither, not direct, but by several stages.<sup>80</sup> The day was hot and the troops were greatly distressed by the fatigue of the march. Possibly for that reason the corps commander, Lieutenant-General Hamilton Gordon,<sup>81</sup> taking with him Major-General Hickie,<sup>82</sup> commanding the 16th Division, visited Major-General Shute<sup>83</sup> of the 19th Division, which was next on the left, and arranged that the northern half of the 33rd Brigade's objective should be attacked by the foremost brigade (57th) of the 19th Division. This precaution, which proved of the utmost value, was rendered possible by the almost complete absence of German artillery-fire, which had left practically intact several of the battalions allotted for the earlier objectives. General Gordon decided to advance some of these to the Black Dotted Line<sup>84</sup> with orders to establish there not merely outposts, but a main line of defence.

The commander of the 19th Division, receiving this order at 12.30, warned the corps commander that the time for distributing orders was short, and the 57th Brigade might be late, and he afterwards asked for a postponement. On receiving the reply that he must do the best he could, he ordered that brigade to advance under the barrage, even if there was not time to instruct company and platoon commanders as to their objectives.<sup>85</sup>

On the 4th Australian Division's front, the 13th Brigade which had been held back in safety, sent forward its two

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<sup>80</sup> First to "Vierstraat Switch," and later to "Chinese Wall."

<sup>81</sup> Lieut.-Gen. Sir A. Hamilton Gordon, K.C.B., p.s.c. Commanded IX Corps, 1916/18. Officer of British Regular Army; of Chalfont St. Giles, Bucks, Eng.; b. 6 July, 1859.

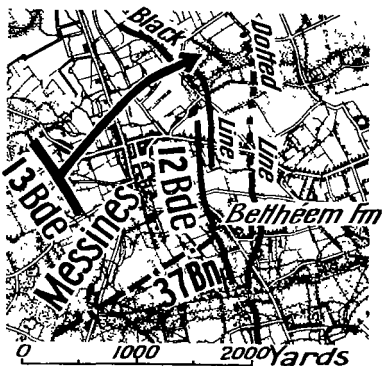
<sup>82</sup> Major-Gen. Sir W. B. Hickie, K.C.B., p.s.c. Commanded 16th Div., 1915/18. Officer of British Regular Army; of Dublin, Ireland, b. 21 May, 1865.

<sup>83</sup> Gen. Sir C. D. Shute, K.C.B., K.C.M.G., p.s.c. Commanded 59th Inf. Bde., 1915/16. 63rd Div., 1916/17; 32nd Div., 1917, 19th Div., 1917; 32nd Div., 1917/18, V Corps, 1918/19. Officer of British Regular Army; of London; b. Dorking, Surrey, Eng., 15 March, 1866. Died 25 Jan., 1936.

<sup>84</sup> Known in the IX Corps area as the "Mauve Line."

<sup>85</sup> The 33rd Brigade was warned that the 57th might be late, and was instructed in that case to look to the safety of its own left flank.

attacking battalions to their jumping-off lines at 1.40 p.m. Although they were completely hidden from the enemy until they reached the crest north of Messines, these—as the 12th Brigade had done two hours earlier—ran into a sharp barrage of heavy shell when near the crest. One of the two battalion commanders, Colonel Pope<sup>86</sup> of the 52nd, was seriously wounded, as was Captain Christophers,<sup>87</sup> commanding a company of the same battalion. Captain Stubbings<sup>88</sup> took charge of the 52nd, and both battalions were led straight on to their tapes, the southern flank of their lines joining those of the 12th Brigade near the mound of Blauwenmolen windmill. Here, lying down, they were sheltered from view of the Germans to the south-east whence the shell-fire came.



The commander of the 3rd Bavarian Division afterwards told Crown Prince Rupprecht that his 4.1-inch guns, having been reduced to two by the British counter-battery fire, could not adequately deal with the tempting targets offered by the columns passing over Messines Ridge. Only where the columns came within range of the 4th Bavarian Division's artillery in the south were material losses caused (*i.e.*, in the 12th Brigade and 3rd and New Zealand Divisions).

The bombardment at this juncture was due to the commencement of an extensive German counter-attack. The British patrols, whose task was to seize enemy guns and examine the wire of the Oosttaverne Line, were out in front of the Black Dotted

#### **The Counter-attack**

<sup>86</sup> The same who commanded the 16th Battalion at Pope's Hill in Gallipoli, and later the 14th Brigade. Some time after his return to Australia in 1916, he had obtained leave to return to England in charge of a transport, and had then been appointed to the vacant command of the 52nd. He quickly gained the confidence and affection of the battalion—not fortunate in all its original staff. His thigh was now too badly broken to permit of further service, and his loss was keenly felt.

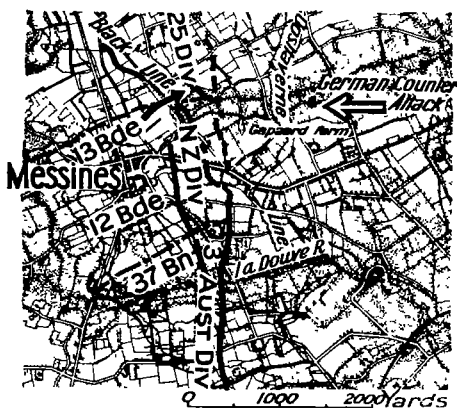
<sup>87</sup> Maj. W. H. Christophers, 50th Bn. Civil servant, of Adelaide; b. Adelaide, 11 Nov., 1894.

<sup>88</sup> Capt. C. H. Stubbings, M.C.; 52nd Bn Clerk; of Zeehan, Tasmania; b. Zeehan, 13 Jan., 1892.

Line, the New Zealanders, as would be expected with troops of their mettle, taking particular pains to secure information which might assist the 4th Australian Division's attack in the afternoon. Patrols of the corps cavalry, who tried to move into the same area, suffered sharply, horses and men being at once hit,<sup>89</sup> but the New Zealand patrols moved to "Oxygen Trench," an outlier of the Oosttaverne Line, north of Huns' Walk, and to the Oosttaverne wire which, where they saw it, was well cut.

During the hour before noon, however, not only the patrols but the troops digging on the ridge saw German reinforcements two and a half miles east of Messines, coming along Huns' Walk. By 1 o'clock the head of this movement was close to the Oosttaverne Line at the foot of the ridge, near Deconinck Farm, north of the trees of Gapaard.

Shortly afterwards the first waves were seen moving across the fields to the Oosttaverne Line on the left and centre of the II Anzac front—the very position that was presently to be attacked by the 4th Australian Division, the 37th Battalion, and the 33rd British Brigade. At 1.30 the



German artillery laid a sharp bombardment on both sides of Messines ridge, and at the same time headquarters as far back as corps were informed that the Germans were advancing to counter-attack. Since 9.55 the British artillery had been steadily bombarding the Oosttaverne Line in preparation for the afternoon attack. It now thickened its fire, which about 2.10 p.m. was further intensified by an order for the S.O.S. barrage. The massed

<sup>89</sup> The II Anzac Mounted Regiment lost this day 7 killed and 12 wounded. Cavalry patrols of the IX Corps also found it impossible to carry out their task on horseback.

machine-guns behind the ridge joined in. The forward posts of the New Zealand and 25th Divisions opened with heavy rifle and machine-gun fire, and, although in the valley of the Blauwepoortbeek due east of Messines some Germans crossed the Oosttaverne Line, the Black Dotted Line was nowhere reached or approached. By 2.30 the effort was completely spent. Whatever Germans had passed the Oosttaverne Line fell back upon it.

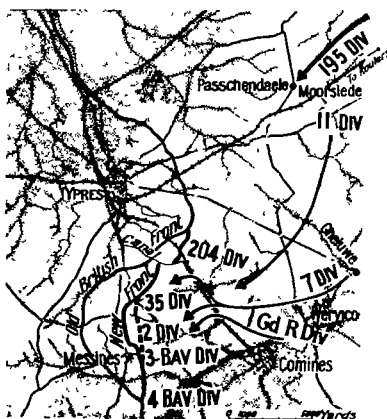
German accounts show that the effort so easily repelled was the main German counter-attack in this battle.

Minor local counter-attacks had already been attempted; although the front-line and support battalions of each of the three regiments of the 3rd Bavarian Division had practically been wiped out in the first and second lines, their reserve battalions in the Oosttaverne Line had made certain efforts to retake the lost ground. About the time when the New Zealanders were emerging from Messines a company of the reserve battalion of the 17th Bavarian I.R. is said to have advanced "to Blauwenmolen," and at 5.45 two more companies followed it. They came into heavy artillery-fire and went to ground. The weakness of this effort may be judged by the fact that it was through, or close in front of, the area of this advance that Lieutenant Hallam of the 49th Battalion led his 14 scouts to Despagne Farm. At 8 o'clock, the artillery-fire being too heavy to be endured in the open, the companies of the 17th Bavarian I.R. had fallen back on the Oosttaverne Line. In the next sector to the south the reserve battalion of the 18th Bavarian I.R. had early sent forward part of one company, which had met the attacking troops and been captured. The rest of the battalion had manned the Oosttaverne Line at Huns' Walk in full strength, and fired at their opponents whom they could see digging in 800 yards away (on the Black Line). Their fire (according to the regimental historian—so is history written) "compelled the English to dig in; this the English did, meanwhile taking off their coats and unsophisticatedly offering their white shirts as a beautiful target for our machine-gun crews." Their "unsophisticated" enemy was the New Zealand Division, possibly the most formidable opponent met by German infantry in the war. These Germans noted that, after its early crippling through the British gas, their own artillery had appeared to revive somewhat, but that its effort did not last; and, when the British bombardment of the Oosttaverne Line began, their own position there also had become precarious. The 17th Bavarian I.R. had sought cover in shell-holes outside the actual trenches, only to be shot at by British airmen as it lay there. Meanwhile the Germans had detected the movement of masses of British troops to renew the attack, and the artillery of the 4th Bavarian Division in the south had been turned upon these, the German infantry also firing at them.

At this highly critical time, about noon, the first troops of the special counter-attack divisions arrived. Three divisions had early been set in motion—the 1st Guard Reserve Division, from Comines, towards the



southern half of the front; and the 7th and 11th Divisions to the central and northern sectors. In addition, the 195th Division of the Ypres Group was ordered to Passchendaele,<sup>90</sup> so as to be nearer, if required. Of these reserves, the 1st Guard Reserve Division was allotted to the commander of the 3rd Bavarian Division (General von Wenninger), responsible for Messines, and he was also given the resting regiment (5th Bavarian R.I.R.) of the 4th Bavarian Division. The 7th Division was given to the commander (General von Hahn) of the 35th Division, north of Wytschaete. By 11 o'clock it was known that both Messines and Wytschaete had been lost, and orders were issued that the 7th and 1st Guard Reserve Divisions should be immediately thrown in to retake them. Crown Prince Rupprecht noted that Wytschaete must "at all costs" be recaptured as the "commanding point."



The forces destined for the southern half of this counter-attack were much the closest to the battlefield,<sup>91</sup> and were the first to arrive. It was the leading troops of the 1st Guard Reserve Division that were seen near Gapaard Farm, and their advent was exceedingly welcome to the remnant of the 17th Bav. I.R. holding on in shell-holes about the Oosttaverne Line. As nothing could be heard of the 7th Division, von Wenninger decided to order the Guard Reserve to attack at once. About 1 o'clock the 1st Guard Reserve Regiment moved to cross the Oosttaverne Line, but so untrained were its troops in open warfare that the brigade commander himself had to point out to company after company the direction he wished them to follow. The reinforcements for the 18th Bavarian I.R. at Huns' Walk were very late in moving to the attack, but at Gapaard the III Battalion, reinforcing the 17th Bavarian I.R., crossed the Oosttaverne Line under protection of fire from the 12th Bavarian Field Artillery Regiment, which, with part of the 1st Guard Reserve Division's own artillery, had come into position.<sup>92</sup>

The reports which afterwards reached the German commanders concerning this attack were extraordinarily inaccurate. It was said to

<sup>90</sup> Then a billeting area, 4½ miles behind the German front in the Ypres sector.

<sup>91</sup> The 1st Guard Reserve Division was about Roncq, between Tourcoing and Wervicq, and the 5th Bav. R.I.R. near Warneton and le Pacau. The 1st G.R.D. had already faced Australian troops this year at Malt Trench and Grevillers.

<sup>92</sup> The Bavarian Official History states that part of the 12th Bav. F.A.R. moved forward with the 1st Guard Reserve Division. The II Abteilung, 1st Guard Reserve F.A.R., opened fire at 1.30 p.m., covering the 1st Guard Reserve Regiment. Through the dust curtain of the British barrage, however, observation was almost impossible.

have reached the eastern edge of Messines, whereas, in fact, it barely crossed the Oostaverne Line, and even the advanced posts on the Black Dotted Line, 1,000 yards east of Messines, were hardly threatened.<sup>93</sup>

Between 2.45 and 3—a little late, owing to the necessity of beating off this counter-attack—the British batteries passed to their rôle of protecting the 3.10 attack on the “Green Line.”

**The afternoon  
attack—(1) at  
Huns' Walk**

South of Huns' Walk they merely intensified their fire, but north of it they brought back their barrage, which screened with its dust the jumping-off line. Behind the dust-curtain the companies of the 12th Brigade that had been temporarily withdrawn,<sup>94</sup> and the 37th Battalion on their right, went forward to their jumping-off positions. The order—which always stirred a suppressed excitement—to “fix bayonets” was given. At the same time over the southern shoulder of Messines Ridge to Huns' Walk came three of the four tanks that were to assist the 12th Brigade.<sup>95</sup> Those to assist the 13th Brigade north of Messines were late, and one became ditched at the crest.

At 3.10 the barrage advanced at the rate of 100 yards in three minutes. The Australians went forward behind it; those of the 47th Battalion, eager as ever to investigate the war's “side-shows,” fell in behind the 12th Brigade's tanks which, they also believed, would rout out the Germans for them to bayonet. Australian infantrymen were always keen for the experience of plunging a bayonet into an enemy; it was the only one of their weapons which, like the sword and spear, gave the power of direct killing; and its use carried a terror of which history, fiction, and army instructors had given them vivid impressions. The tanks at Messines<sup>96</sup> were of a somewhat later model than those whose complete breakdown had wrecked this division at Bullecourt. The more exposed

<sup>93</sup> The retirement of the British and New Zealand patrols then out in front of the Black Dotted Line, or possibly the withdrawal, through artillery-fire, of some post in that line, furnish the only recognisable grounds for the totally inaccurate statement of the Bavarian Official History (*Die Bayern im Grossen Kriege*, p. 388) that the British would not face this attack and left the field in flight.

<sup>94</sup> See p. 613. The photographs of the barrage given in Vol. XII, plates 334-5, were probably taken about this time or during the German counter-attack. (The time given in the captions, “6 p.m.,” is probably wrong.)

<sup>95</sup> The fourth had broken down near Schnitzel Farm

<sup>96</sup> See Vol. XII, plate 338. The tank personnel with the 12th Brigade were 5th Section, 5th Company. The tanks were named “H.M.S. Lucifer,” “Our Emma,” and “Rumblebelly;” “2005” broke down at Schnitzel Farm.

portions of their sides had been made impervious to armour-piercing bullets, and the Queenslanders were satisfied with the way they advanced. The tank officers found only one fault in the Queenslanders—they were apt to get in front of the tanks.

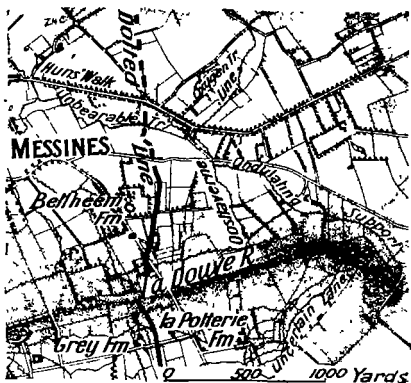
The Oosttaverne Line had probably been barely garrisoned during the morning, but it was certainly well held now along the whole II Anzac front. The advancing lines immediately met a hot rifle and machine-gun fire. Through the dust of the barrage it was impossible as yet to see where this came from, but men were continually hit both in the 37th Battalion south of Huns' Walk, and in the 47th and 45th (12th Brigade) advancing astride and north of that road. Through the dust about 100 Germans were observed advancing from the Oosttaverne Line to its outlier, Oxygen Trench, just north of Huns' Walk. Here the barrage passed over them. A tank came across from Huns' Walk, shelled the trench, and returned. The Germans were cowed by it, and the inner flanks of the 47th and 45th then easily seized the trench, took 120 prisoners, and continued their advance on the Oosttaverne Line.



From German accounts it seems probable that the 45th had here run into the leading waves of the main German counter-attack in the sector of the 18th Bavarian I.R. "At the decisive moment," says the historian of that regiment, "there arrived behind the trenches of the 18th two battalions of the 1st Guard Reserve Regiment and one of the 5th Bavarian R.I.R." Their orders were to recapture Messines. When their counter-attack failed, these troops—the bulk of whom must have been still moving up from the rear—reinforced the 18th in the Oosttaverne Line and behind it.

The sections of the Oosttaverne Line north and south of the Douve formed a particularly complicated system. The German garrisons of Messines and of the sector south of the Douve had been accustomed to use the Douve valley as their avenue of approach for both men and supplies moving to

the front from Warneton. From a point in the valley about half-a-mile on the Warneton side of the Oosttaverne Line, two main communication trenches led up to this line, and through it to the intermediate and front lines: the communication trench on the southern side of the valley ("Uncertain Lane") ran into the Oosttaverne Line at the Potterie Farm; that on the northern side ("Undulating Support") crossed the Oosttaverne Line just south of Huns' Walk.<sup>97</sup> According to the British maps, the Oosttaverne Line north of this communication trench was a double one along the whole front of the 4th Division's attack. Actually, the only parts



of the support trench that had been dug were some 200 yards astride of Huns' Walk, and one or two isolated lengths a mile farther north. The rest had been little more than marked out for digging, or, in some parts, not even marked.

Yet it was this supposed support trench that was the objective for the companies in the second line of the attack. The first-line companies were to take only the front trench. The barrage was to lie on the front trench till 3.30, when the leading companies would seize that trench. The barrage would then fall on the support trench until 3.45, when the second-line companies would capture it. For half-an-hour the guns would throw their fire 300 yards beyond, to protect the troops while they consolidated the position.<sup>98</sup> The artillery would then cease fire in order to allow mounted patrols to go forward. The non-existence of most of the support trench had been noted from air-photographs; and some of the company commanders studying these photographs had also remarked that, although the maps showed hardly a tree in this area, the ground south of Huns' Walk was crossed by

<sup>97</sup> West of the Oosttaverne Line this trench was known as "Unbearable Trench."

<sup>98</sup> The barrage of massed machine-guns would last from 3.10 to 3.30.

many tree-lined hedges. So thick were these that the angle formed by the junctions of the northern communication trench and the Oosttaverne Line seemed to be filled by a small wood. In this "scrub" the German garrison and reinforcements were largely screened, but throughout the afternoon there could constantly be seen signs of the German reserves still advancing or being marshalled in the more distant copses.

As the Australians approached the Oosttaverne Line, the fire from hedges, trenches, and certain concrete blockhouses became exceedingly severe, and on the left of the 12th Brigade the men had to fling themselves down under fire from machine-guns close ahead. At least four of these blockhouses stood actually in or beside this section of the front Oosttaverne trench<sup>99</sup>—one 100 yards south of Huns' Walk, a second at the Walk, and two at wide intervals north of it. Some of them had been visible during the wait on the jumping-off position, and the opposition was not unexpected.

Nevertheless, this was the first experience that Australians had of a new form of fighting, which was henceforth to mark all battles in Flanders. Ludendorff and  
**"Pillbox"  
fighting** Hindenburg, seeing that deep dugouts were too often mere traps for their men, had enjoined reliance on superficial concrete shelters (afterwards known among British troops as "pillboxes"<sup>100</sup>). In Flanders the waterlogged nature of the ground also rendered these preferable, and they had been constructed thickly throughout the German lines at Messines and Ypres. Those covered with soil or camouflage had by now been exposed by the bombardment, and on this battlefield, as at Ypres later in the year, most of them lay as bare as toy bricks, scattered over the crater-fields. But, though fairly obvious targets, often easily visible to observers or on air-photographs, they would withstand the direct hit of all but the heaviest shells. Thus the garrison had a good chance of surviving even the heaviest bombardment, and of emerging with its machine-guns as soon as the barrage passed. Some blockhouses were loop-holed so that machine-guns could fire from within; but most

<sup>99</sup> Opposite the 37th Battalion, on the right, this trench was called "Uncanny"; farther north it was known as "Owl" (see *Vol XII, plate 341*).

<sup>100</sup> In the I Anzac records this name appears first on 5 Sept., 1917, in the form "pillar boxes"

were simply rectangular boxes of concrete, blind except for an exit at the rear. At such posts the machine-gunners had to hurry out with their gun, and mount it on the trench parapet, or on a concrete platform beside the blockhouse, or sometimes on the blockhouse roof. If they were quick, their action might hold up the advance in the neighbourhood. On the other hand, the new British platoon organisation was specially devised for fighting such obstacles—the rifle-grenadiers and Lewis gunners being present to cover the riflemen and bombers while these worked round the blockhouse and took it in rear. This method, however, became impossible if the enemy held out in other supporting positions in rear and on the flanks.

The tension accompanying the struggles around these blockhouses—the murderous fire from a sheltered position, followed by the sudden giving-in of the surrounded garrison—caused this year's fighting in Flanders to be marked by a ferocity that renders the reading of any true narrative peculiarly unpleasant. Where such tension exists in battle, the rules of "civilised" war are powerless. Most men are temporarily half-mad, their pulses pounding at their ears, their mouths dry. The noblest among them are straining their wills to keep cool heads and even voices; the less self-controlled are for the time being governed by reckless, primitive impulse. With death singing about their ears, they will kill until they grow tired of killing. When they have been racked with machine-gun fire, the routing out of enemy groups from behind several feet of concrete is almost inevitably the signal for a butchery at least of the first few who emerge, and sometimes even the helplessly wounded may not be spared. It is idle for the reader to cry shame upon such incidents, unless he cries out upon the whole system of war, for this frenzy is an inevitable condition in desperate fighting. The nobler the leaders the more they endeavour to mitigate futile ruthlessness, but ruthlessness is a quality essential in hand-to-hand fighting, and soldiers were deliberately trained to it.

In this, their first introduction to blockhouse fighting, the Australians were not assisted by artillery preparation as elaborate as in the earlier phase of the battle; the Germans, freshly reinforced, were able to stand and fight, and the struggle was especially fierce. When the 47th Battalion was first held up by a blockhouse near Huns' Walk, two Lewis



29. A "PILLBOX" AT MESSINES, SHOWING TWO ENTRANCES (AT GROUND LEVEL), AND THE  
POCKETS ABOVE FOR HOLDING REVOLVER AND OTHER AMMUNITION AND BOMBS

The roof has been camouflaged with netting

*Just II or Memorial Official Photo No E552.  
Taken on 31st July, 1917*



30. HUNS' WALK AND A PILLBOX IN THE OOSTAVERNE LINE NEAR SEPTIÈME BARN, WHERE  
THE 47TH BATTALION ATTACKED ON 7TH JUNE, 1917

*Aust War Memorial Official Photo No E1295.  
Taken on 20th November, 1917*

*To face p 625.*



gunners, each firing from a flank (on the order of Lieutenant Schulz,<sup>101</sup> who had succeeded Captain Davy) ripped the concrete sides of the loop-hole until the machine-gun inside ceased to fire. Some Queenslanders crept past the flanks, and then from the rear poured shot after shot into the garrison huddled inside, so that the shrieking men melted into a groaning heap which gradually fell silent. To make sure that no one was left in the place, the bodies were dragged into the light and lay for days afterwards piled outside.<sup>102</sup>

A second "pillbox" was captured by Lieutenant Bird<sup>103</sup> leading a party round its flank and rushing it from the rear. Farther south, while the barrage was still on the German front line, the left company of the 37th (Victoria),<sup>104</sup> on filing through a gap in some wire half-way to the German trench, had found itself suddenly under machine-gun fire which quickly struck down half the men and all the officers except the company commander, Captain Grieve.<sup>105</sup> To save the company from extermination, Grieve, who could see the machine-gun firing from a loop-holed blockhouse in the trench, signalled to his men to wait in shell-holes while he sought for a Vickers machine-gun and a Stokes mortar which were to have advanced with his company.<sup>106</sup> He found that the trench-mortar crew had been shattered by a heavy German shell which had fallen among them early in the advance, and that the machine-gun and its crew had been hit by the German fire when in the entanglement. The officer in charge of this gun, however, Lieutenant Fraser,<sup>107</sup> himself repaired it with wire cut from the entanglement, but, on his mounting it and trying himself to suppress the German fire, both he and the gun were quickly hit.

<sup>101</sup> Lieut. J. Schulz, M.C.; 47th Bn. Station hand; of Rockhampton and Aramac, Q'land; b. Rockhampton, 3 Feb., 1894.

<sup>102</sup> The narrative of this fighting is largely based on the exceedingly vivid and detailed diary of Private Galloway, 47th Battalion, who took part. This diary forms an interesting exhibit in the Australian War Memorial.

<sup>103</sup> Lieut. B. R. Bird, M.C.; 47th Bn. Machinist; of Brisbane; b. Brisbane, 12 Dec., 1891.

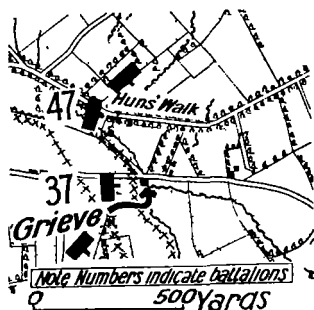
<sup>104</sup> According to Colonel Smith's orders, this company should have advanced in the second line, to capture the German support line, but it found itself advancing on the left of the other companies.

<sup>105</sup> Lieutenants R. K. McDougall and W. B. King were wounded. Lieutenant L. P. Little had been badly gassed in the morning, and had to be sent back before this attack began. (McDougall belonged to Kew, Vic.; King to Abbotsford, Vic.; Little to Melbourne.)

<sup>106</sup> Grieve was to have placed these in a strong-post just behind his objective.

<sup>107</sup> Lieut. A. J. Fraser, M.C.; 10th M.G. Coy. Dairy student; of Kyneton, Vic.; b. Melbourne, 20 Aug., 1892.

Grieve thereupon decided himself to attack the German machine-gun. Its arc of fire was limited by the loop-hole through which it was shooting. Grieve, taking with him a bag of bombs, and throwing one every now and then in the direction of the loop-hole, was able to rush forward, a few shell-holes at a time, under cover of the dust raised by the explosions. He was helped by the fact that the burst of each bomb also caused the German gunners to cease fire for a moment. Having thus safely passed through the ground covered by the gun's fire, he made his way into the German trench, which, when he entered it, was empty, all Germans in the neighbourhood being still under shelter from the British bombardment. Another bomb thrown close to the loop-hole caused the machine-gunners in the blockhouse to cease fire, and taking advantage of this silence Grieve went up to the loop-hole and rolled two more through the opening. After waiting for the bursts, he walked to the dugout entrance, and found the crew lying killed or wounded around their gun.



Grieve now signalled to his company, which came up and occupied the trench. To the east Germans could be seen making to the rear down their communication trench. A Lewis gunner, Private Babington,<sup>108</sup> laid his gun on this trench in enfilade and shot them down. Grieve, whose action at a crucial moment had its effect on the success of the day,<sup>109</sup> was still standing on the parapet, signalling to part of his thin line<sup>110</sup> to come up on the flank of the 47th, who could be seen 300 yards away at Huns' Walk, when he was badly wounded by a sniper. On his right Lieutenant Stubbs's company had rushed the trench as soon as the barrage lifted, and took there about 80 prisoners.<sup>111</sup> The first Oosttaverne trench, so far as

<sup>108</sup> L/Cpl. W. E. Babington (No. 228; 37th Bn.). Dairyman; of Stacey's Bridge, Vic.; b. Trentham, Vic., 22 Sept., 1891. Killed in action, 8 June, 1917.

<sup>109</sup> He was awarded the Victoria Cross.

<sup>110</sup> He had now only some 40 men to cover 250 yards

<sup>111</sup> While settling these prisoners temporarily in shell-holes for their own safety, Lieutenant Stubbs was wounded

it lay within this part of the objective, was thus captured. From the right could be seen in the distance the factories around Lille; nearer were several German batteries, limbering up their guns and retiring. To Grieve, as he made his way to the rear, it seemed as if the chance for open warfare, for which his men had so long been trained, had come at last.

The immediate task, however, according to the plans, was for the support companies to move through and seize the supposed support trench, 200 yards away, beyond another two hedges. But in the stiff fighting to gain the front trench the organisation of the 47th had been broken. Its right front company had lost all its officers killed or mortally wounded,<sup>112</sup> and it was under the leadership of surviving officers of the second company that the front trench had been taken. These officers still directed and controlled, as far as they could, the men around them, but the fight near Huns' Walk became a thorough *mêlée*. With the maddened Australians drawing closer to them from the front, and the barrage now churning the dust behind, many of the Germans still in this area became panic-stricken, and, as the troops approached, fell on their bellies with cries of "Mercy!", "Kamerad!", or flung themselves down to embrace the men's knees. Others bolted, and the sight of them was too much for the pent-up feelings of the attacking troops, who, despite their officers' attempts at restraint, every now and then rose and rushed forward after the fugitives. A few incidents are recorded. Two men of the 37th attempted to bomb a machine-gun firing from a concrete shelter.<sup>113</sup> One of the two was hit, but the other, Private McCarthy,<sup>114</sup> running behind what cover he could get, worked round the place and thrust a bomb through a loop-hole in the side. Its explosion was followed by a minute's silence, and then the gun resumed its fire. McCarthy at once put a bomb through the loop-hole in front, and destroyed the crew.

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<sup>112</sup> Captain J. W. Millar (Perth, W. Aust.), Lieutenant G. N. M. Goode (Orange, N.S.W., and Southport, Tas.), and Lieutenant W. S. Dixon (Boggabri, N.S.W., and Brisbane)

<sup>113</sup> At this point the Germans were routed from a building known as "Septieme Barn," beside Huns' Walk. Here, or in a shelter near it, was the power plant supplying electric light to the German "dugout" system.

<sup>114</sup> Cpl P. McCarthy, D.C.M. (No. 6049, 37th Bn) Miner, of Eaglehawk Vic., b. Birchip, Vic., 8 June, 1893. Killed in action, 12 Oct., 1917

Making headway against such difficulties south of the Walk, the 37th and 47th rushed the enemy from hedge to hedge. A mixed force from the flanks of both battalions reached and occupied the fragment of support line astride of Huns' Walk. North of this trench the country was open, and, protected by the barrage, the left of the 47th under Captain Williams<sup>115</sup> advanced swiftly. As the rear company, which was to seize the Oosttaerne "support line," had suffered heavily, Williams took forward his whole force to that position, the Germans fleeing ahead of him. Here, although his last officer, Lieutenant C. H. King,<sup>116</sup> was now hit, Williams took position in shell-holes along the trace of the support trench. Close beyond him lay a small hedged field, screening with its trees a "pillbox."

On this side of Huns' Walk the tanks had been of much assistance in the first stage of the attack, cowing the enemy and making useful tracks through the wire; but at about 4 o'clock they began to turn back. One, commanded by Lieutenant Vans Agnew,<sup>117</sup> stayed on Huns' Walk until 4.20, and might now have greatly helped had not the camouflage packed on its roof caught fire. Agnew climbed up there and, seated on top in the open, with the admiring infantry looking on, fought the fire with a pyrene extinguisher and saved his tank.

The infantry had thenceforward to fight its way unassisted, but south of the road a whirlwind advance continued. Except at the Walk itself, practically no trace of the "support trench" here existed, but some 300 yards south-east of this the Australians reached a shrubbery in which there was wild shooting into every bush, and routing out of prisoners almost too numerous to be controlled. Some of the enemy were firing from a hedge a few yards farther on, and a machine-gun was found in action near one of the bushes. Its two gunners could not aim all ways at once, and the advancing line quickly lapped round them, yet they kept the gun firing until the Australians shot them at a yard's range. The troops now

<sup>115</sup> Capt. E. O. Williams, M.C.; 47th Bn. Farmer; of Leven, Tas.; b. Forth, Tas., 28 May, 1882.

<sup>116</sup> Of the second line company. Its commander, Lieutenant D. F. Salmon, and Lieutenants F. F. Campbell and A. R. Walker lost their lives in this battle. (King belonged to Maryborough, Q'land; Salmon to Rockhampton, Q'land; Campbell to Cygnet, Tas.; and Walker to Toowoomba, Q'land.)

<sup>117</sup> Capt. F. Vans Agnew, M.C.; 2nd Regt., King Edward's Horse, and Royal Tank Corps. Mining assayer; of Falmouth, Cornwall, Eng.; b. Chitoor, India, 28 Apr., 1868.

found themselves faced by a farm building from near which two machine-guns were firing. Both were captured, and the farm—apparently that known to the Germans as “Nesselhof,” and to the 47th afterwards as “Hun House”—was taken.<sup>118</sup>

It had served as a German battalion headquarters, and from one of its buildings fluttered the red cross flag of a German aid post. Covered by his men, an Australian officer moved to the door and beckoned to the inmates. As they began to come out he was shot through the shoulder. The Australians behind him, thinking that the shot came from the building, would have killed every



man in it, but the officer, though in much pain, stood in their way and they had to allow 30 unwounded Germans to troop out and move off unhurt as prisoners.

No active enemy could now be seen close by. But from the dense trees around “Steignast Farm,” 400 yards ahead, and from the wooded valley of the Douve further south, came machine-gun fire, and Germans were seen there re-forming. The barrage had died away.<sup>119</sup> The few surviving leaders agreed to take position along the next hedge. The troops made for it, sharply fired at from the distant trees, and there the advance near Huns’ Walk ended. The Germans had been completely routed from this important sector, but the advanced troops were out of touch on both flanks. The maps omitted many landmarks, and the officer then in charge believed that his men were on their objective, but they seem actually to have been 250 yards beyond it.

<sup>118</sup> German unit historians are obviously unaware of any fighting in this quarter, and the Australian staff did not realise that its infantry had gone so far. But the detailed description in Private Gallwey’s diary clearly applies to this farm and to no other. In other respects, his account of incidents within his actual view has been confirmed, and his evidence on this point is therefore accepted.

<sup>119</sup> It was to stop at 4.15 to allow mounted patrols to go forward. It need hardly be said that this arrangement was entirely impracticable: these patrols could not get there, and, if they had arrived, could not have gone forward on horseback.

Far to their right rear the second-line company of the 37th, under Captain Symons (of Lone Pine fame), and an attached company of the 40th under Captain Giblin,<sup>120</sup> had precisely carried out their duty of forming the flank of the Green Line, slightly withdrawn to join the flank of the 9th Brigade south of the stream. In their advance up the valley Giblin's Tasmanians had met fire from the Potterrie, south of the river, and from a small two-storey blockhouse near the Douve bridge. A number, including Giblin himself, were hit, but the machine-gunners in the blockhouse ran before the troops reached them, and the 37th and 40th began to dig—as air-photographs afterwards showed—exactly on the line intended.<sup>121</sup> South of the Douve the northern flank of the 34th Battalion (9th Brigade) had already been swung up into line by Captain Whitlock.<sup>122</sup>

North of Huns' Walk the southern flank of the 45th under Captain Allen<sup>123</sup> found the first Oostaverne trench protected by thick wire, practically uncut,<sup>124</sup> and behind this a strong blockhouse held up the attack. Captain Allen's company worked round the wire, and Lieutenant Muir,<sup>125</sup> making his way

**(2) In the  
Blauwepoortbeek  
Valley**

<sup>120</sup> Major L. F. Giblin, D S O , M C ; 40th Bn. Fruit grower, of Hobart; later Acting Commonwealth Government Statistician; b. Hobart, 29 Nov., 1872.

<sup>121</sup> Close in front of them beside the rivulet lay a tree-lined enclosure from which a machine-gun fired, rendering the work exceedingly dangerous. Sergeant T. G. Cranswick (of Stanley) took forward his platoon by small parties to suppress this fire. Finding that the machine-gun was in a blockhouse on the nearer edge of the trees, he ordered his rifle-grenadiers to place a barrage around it while a party worked behind the place and rushed it, killing the crew and capturing the gun. Two other machine-guns found to be firing from the northern and southern edges of the same trees were rushed, the one near the river-bank by a party under Corporal S. J. Barrett (of Beaconsfield; killed in action, 12 Oct., 1917), and the other by Private T. Davidson (of Campbell Town). Davidson, though seen by the enemy and wounded, made his way into the sunken road from which the gun was firing and shot down its crew.

<sup>122</sup> Whitlock had not been punctually informed of the two hours' postponement, and, after waiting until 1.40 for the barrage to fall, had gone forward without it. The message as to the new "zero" hour reached him as his men were digging in on their objective. He asked that the artillery should be warned not to fire on his line. Whether or not his message arrived in time, his company maintained its line. (Capt. A. S. Whitlock, 34th Bn. Member of Aust. Permanent Forces; of Camperdown, N.S.W.; b. Wandsworth, Surrey, Eng., 3 July, 1880. Killed in action, 8 June, 1917.)

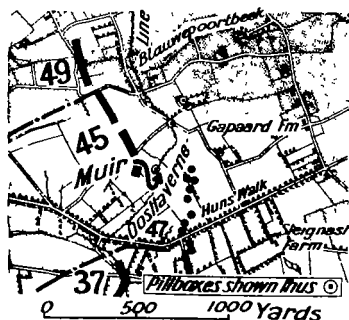
In the available German accounts, Whitlock's advance is interpreted as an attack on the Oostaverne Line south of the Douve, including the Potterrie "Until late at night," according to the Bavarian Official History (*Die Bayern im Grossen Kriege*, p. 388), "the fight flowed hither and thither." Crown Prince Rupprecht is under the impression that the Potterrie Farm had been lost and was retaken. The fact is that the Oostaverne Line south of the Douve and for 500 yards north of it was not, and was not intended to be, attacked.

<sup>123</sup> Brigadier A. S. Allen, D S O , V.D.; 45th Bn. Commands 16th Inf. Bde., A.I.F., 1939. Audit Clerk, of Hurstville, N.S.W.; b. Hurstville, 10 March, 1894.

<sup>124</sup> Even a week later, when the position was well behind the British line, Captain R. W. Jones of the 14th asked that this obstacle should be cut.

<sup>125</sup> Lieut. A. R. Muir, M.C., 45th Bn. Engineering student, of Stanmore, N.S.W.; b. Homebush, N.S.W., 4 March, 1895. Killed in action, 13 Oct., 1917.

along the trench from the south, flung bombs into the blockhouse door and routed the enemy out.<sup>126</sup> Allen then pushed on to the "support trench" on the flank of the 47th. But opposite the northern flank of the 45th the line dipped into the first of a series of small gullies that ran down the eastern slope of Messines Ridge. Low in this valley (that of the Blauwepoortbeek), and invisible from Allen's position, were the ruins of a farm which, like other scattered buildings along the Oosttaerne Line, had been used by the German artillery for gun-positions. In this homestead and orchard were several concrete shelters for gun-crews, and another for a field-gun. Beside the same trench on the northern side of the valley was a row of four concrete shelters for guns as well as several for men.



On these blockhouses most of the German reinforcements who had counter-attacked up the valley at 2 o'clock had fallen back; and, as the southern battalion (49th) of the 13th Brigade and the northern companies (45th Battalion) of the 12th Brigade swept into the valley, they met intense resistance. These companies of the 45th (New South Wales) were to keep their left along a road which happened to lead straight to the ruined farm. Their commander, Captain Young,<sup>127</sup> had promised Lieutenant-Colonel Herring that he would see to this, and, though wounded during the wait on Messines Ridge, he led the 45th's flank along the road in face of the withering fire from this nest of Germans. Captain Hand<sup>128</sup> of the second-line company, which presently closed up to the first, sent word to headquarters that his troops could get no farther, and that a field-gun was blazing at it from 300 yards away. No officer of the leading company returned, but

<sup>126</sup> Twenty prisoners and two machine-guns were captured there.

<sup>127</sup> Capt. W. L. Young, M.C.; 45th Bn. Softgoods warehouseman; of Rainbow, Vic., and Newcastle, N.S.W.; b. Dimboola, Vic., 1891. Killed in action, 7 June, 1917.

<sup>128</sup> Capt. J. A. Hand, 45th Bn. Plate-layer; of Wyong, N.S.W.; b. Penrith, N.S.W., 8 June, 1890.

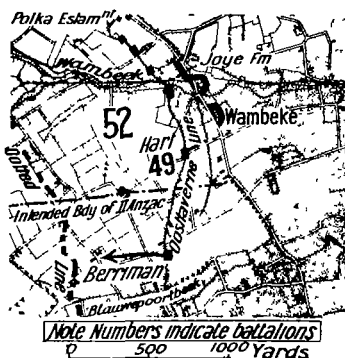
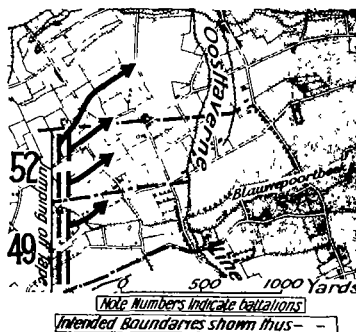




Farm, extended a platoon of his company over part of the vacant front to protect the flank and to clear the ground of Germans, who would otherwise be left behind the battalion. When the advance started and he saw that the company in front of him was meeting only a few sniping shots, Maxwell led his whole company out across the uncovered front, heading north-eastwards into the Wambeek Valley. As they passed through the hedges they came here and there upon

large concrete shelters for guns' crews, from which 80 Germans or more were routed out and captured without resistance. Heading across to fill the gap, Maxwell led his company to the Oosttaverne Line south of the Wambeek. Any Germans who had been holding it had fled, and, under the protective barrage, Maxwell distributed the companies along both trenches. Only a fraction of the support trench existed, but, where it was absent, the troops were lined along the Wambeke-Oosttaverne road and the farmhouses bordering it, the flanks being thrown back to the first trench ("Odour Trench"), as shown in the marginal sketch. Northwards the line was extended along this trench by a couple of posts, and beyond these a patrol was maintained as far as "Polka Estaminet" on the outskirts of Oosttaverne.

The 52nd thus occupied, though with dangerous extension, the whole objective of the 33rd British Brigade. Farther north, as far as could be seen, the Oosttaverne Line seemed at this stage to be empty. On the other flank the southern companies of the 52nd had



—as was almost inevitable—swung north-eastwards with Maxwell, and with them swerved the 49th. A widening gap had thus opened between the 12th and 13th Brigades. This accident had brought one advantage—the 52nd, moving into the Wambeek valley, escaped the withering fire that met the attack down the Blauwepoortbeek; but a great part of the Blauwepoortbeek had been left uncovered. At the top of the spur between the valleys the extreme left of the 49th, under Captain Kay<sup>184</sup> (who was killed there) and Lieutenant Hart,<sup>185</sup> entered the first trench on the flank of the 52nd; but for 1,000 yards south of them the Oostaverne Line on both slopes of the valley was untaken. A party of the 49th under Lieutenant Berriman<sup>186</sup> had held on for a time in the entanglement of the German line, and Berriman on patrolling found part of the trench on the northern side of the Blauwepoortbeek empty. But as his party was exposed and useless in its first position,<sup>187</sup> he withdrew it to a house 300 yards in rear, from which he could to some extent guard the gap by firing down the valley.

The early cessation of the barrage (to allow the intended exit of mounted patrols) left only half-an-hour for quiet consolidation. But the spacing out of troops along so extended a frontage took time, and they had barely begun to dig when the artillery-fire ceased and sniping shots began to be felt, especially from two farms just beyond the line on which Maxwell had placed the 52nd. Lieutenant Chalmers,<sup>188</sup> while stationing his post near Joye Farm, was killed. Captain Anderson<sup>189</sup> was mortally wounded. Most of the shots came from Van Hove Farm on the Oostaverne spur, a little beyond the northern flank of the 52nd. About this time Maxwell, searching the country to his left rear for the British troops who should be arriving, came on a few of the 9th Gloucestershire belonging to the 57th Brigade, and, about 5 o'clock, also

<sup>184</sup> Capt. F. B. Kay, 49th Bn. Architect; of Brisbane, Q'land, and Christchurch, N.Z.; b. Christchurch, 29 Aug., 1892. Killed in action, 7 June, 1917.

<sup>185</sup> Lieut. B. Hart, M.C.; 49th Bn. Architectural draughtsman; of Brisbane, b. Brisbane, 6 Oct., 1895.

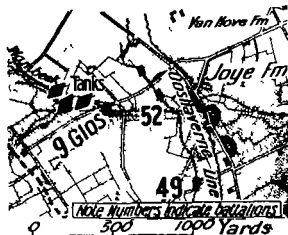
<sup>186</sup> Lieut. F. P. Berriman, M.C.; 49th Bn. Bank official, of Prospect, S. Aust., b. North Adelaide, 31 Dec., 1891.

<sup>187</sup> Lieutenant J. H. Tritton (Richmond, Q'land) reached him there, but was wounded at close range by a German, whom he then shot with his revolver.

<sup>188</sup> Lieut. C. E. A. Chalmers, 52nd Bn. Accountant; of Bellerive, Tas.; b. Hobart, 11 May, 1882. Killed in action, 7 June, 1917.

<sup>189</sup> Son of the Bishop of Riverina. (Capt. R. Anderson, 52nd Bn. Grazier; of Hay, N.S.W.; b. West Maitland, N.S.W., 15 Oct., 1892. Died of wounds, 8 June, 1917.)

found a platoon of the Worcestershire halted some way back in the Wambeek valley. Here, too, were three of the IX Corps' tanks, which had come past the north of Wytschaete.<sup>140</sup> Maxwell asked the tanks and the Gloucestershire to go out and seize Van Hove Farm. The tanks moved at once, the first, a "male," firing its six-pounder gun at the farm to scare the Germans, and a second, a "female" (*i.e.*, armed with machine-guns only), leading forward the infantry. Two companies of the 6th Border Regiment (the first troops of the 33rd Brigade seen by Maxwell<sup>141</sup>) came up at this time with their adjutant, and appear to have taken part in this attack. The Germans were driven out, and the farm was occupied.<sup>142</sup>



It is now known that the heat and strain of the march, especially over the broken ground near Wytschaete, had been too much for the 33rd Brigade. As has been seen,<sup>143</sup> the time for its start, as ordered by the 16th Division, was dangerously late, but at 1.15 verbal orders arrived that, "as the enemy was demoralised and surrendering freely," the march must be pushed on "without any regard for the distress of the troops." As the rest of the brigade was behind time, the 7th South Staffordshire, originally the brigade reserve, were ordered to push on with the 6th Lincolnshire; but when the attack started the foremost battalion commanders were still behind the ridge, and had only a few companies with them, the rest of the troops being out of touch with them, and in some cases completely lost. The leading companies, although late, went forward, but, finding other troops ahead, most of them halted on the slope and tried to get touch with

<sup>140</sup> They belonged to No. 2 Company. The 13th Brigade's own tanks (No. 6 Section of No. 5 Company) were late. One was ditched on the Messines crest and two near the jumping-off line at Despagne Farm. The fourth went to the right of Oxygen Trench, which, however, had already been captured. This tank was struck by a shell on its way back.

<sup>141</sup> It is possible, however, that a few of the 7th South Staffordshire had already arrived. They helped to rout some Germans out of the houses on the Wambeke-Oosttaverne road, and afterwards withdrew to "Mahieu Farm."

<sup>142</sup> Maxwell was unaware that the 6th Border attacked the farm. There is no doubt, however, that it was occupied by men of that battalion under Captain J. W. Hood, and was held till dusk by troops under Lieutenant J. H. Mann. (Hood belonged to Edinburgh; Mann to Walsingham, Surrey, Eng.)

<sup>143</sup> PP. 614-5.

the rest of their battalions.<sup>144</sup> At nightfall the brigade was still unorganised, its battalion headquarters and separate companies being sprinkled about the eastern slope, unaware, in many cases, of each other's position.

In spite of these mishaps the main part of the Oostaverne Line was in the Second Army's possession, exactly half the battle-front — from the southern flank to near Oostaverne—being held by Australian troops. In this sector there was only one portion of the objective uncaptured — the 1,000 yards across the Blauwepoortbeek valley. Australian commanders then and afterwards expressed regret that the afternoon attack had not been made at the original hour, 1.10, before the German reinforcements came up.<sup>145</sup> But, as events proved, General



Plumer was wise in ordering the two hours' postponement. Even with "zero" at 3.10, the 57th Brigade was only just in time with its attack, and the 33rd Brigade was too late. It is not too much to say that the attack on the Oostaverne Line was saved from probable failure by two circumstances—first, the postponement of the hour, and, second, the action of the young Tasmanian, Captain Maxwell, in filling the gap, clearing out the Germans who would otherwise have been in rear of the advancing troops, securing the vacant front, and holding it until the British centre came up.<sup>146</sup>

<sup>144</sup> Part of one company of the 7th South Staffordshire pushed on to Wambeke, but, finding the Australians there with some of the 9th Gloucestershire, withdrew to Mahieu Farm.

<sup>145</sup> Even the Potterie Farm, though not included in the day's objectives, could easily have been taken at the first rush.

<sup>146</sup> This practically agrees with a generous acknowledgment of Maxwell's services sent in by the commander of the 33rd Brigade after the battle.

## CHAPTER XVI

### HOLDING THE GAINS AT MESSINES

LONG before sunset on June 7th the final British objective had been won along practically the whole battle-front. The plan had been fulfilled with a swift completeness far beyond that of any major achievement of the British Army in France until that day. The German press, inspired by the high command, laid stress on the supposed immensity of the loss inflicted on the British, and the enemy's commanders, and even German historians to this day, appear to have been under the impression that the Oosttaverne Line (the German "Sehnen Linie") remained in their own hands. Actually the British loss had been slighter than in most offensives—although, for the whole battle, it seems, on the crude figures,<sup>1</sup> to have slightly exceeded that of the Germans; and the Oosttaverne Line, except for one or possibly more short lengths, was held by the British.

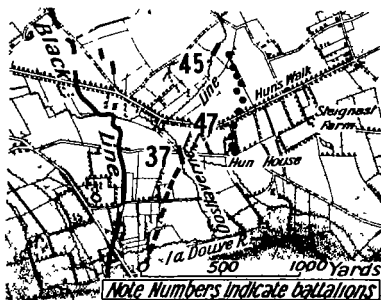
From the moment when the attacking troops reached it, they were on the look out for the expected German counter-attack. Though they hardly realized it, part of the main counter-attack had already been defeated, but other parts of it afterwards fell on them—almost immediately at Huns' Walk, and, during the night, near Oosttaverne.

At Huns' Walk, the advanced and isolated portions of the 47th and 37th beyond Hun House were watching the enemy form up in the trees at Steignast Farm and the Douve valley. The barrage had ceased, and machine-gun fire from these trees and from hidden pillboxes was intense. Digging-in was made difficult, and most of the officers were hit. Artillery assistance was obviously required, but most foolishly, when the contact aeroplane came over, the troops, fearing to show their position to the enemy, failed to fire their flares. Their precise position was therefore unknown to the staffs in rear, and runners and

**II Anzac—**  
**Southern front**

<sup>1</sup> Investigations made by the British Official Historian into the figures for casualties on the Somme, 1916, suggest that those given for British casualties may have been somewhat in excess of the true total. (*See Military Operations, France and Belgium, 1916, pp. 483, 496.*)

stretcher-bearers, by whom at first they had sent messages, could not now cross the open. About this time, however, at some position in the first Oosttaverne Line, a quarter of a mile behind the advanced front, a keen half-Chinese Australian, by name Shang,<sup>2</sup> managed to get a Lucas lamp into working order, and, at the order of an officer there, sent a message asking for the assistance of the artillery. To the surprise of those who watched, an answering signal showed that the message had been received.



It had hardly been sent when, about 5.30 p.m., an extended wave of Germans was seen advancing from the trees followed by other waves, the movement being covered by machine-gun fire. The Australian officers lined their men along the hedge and, when the leading Germans were a hundred yards away, gave the word to fire. Their men stood up and shot till some of their rifles became too hot to work. One powerful fellow even fired his Lewis gun from the shoulder. The counter-attack in front melted, but presently it was seen that the Germans were still advancing on the left, and fire was switched thither.<sup>3</sup>

Soon afterwards the troops observed a heavy barrage drop behind them. A few German shells were falling around, and officers and men at first imagined that the barrage in rear also was German. Presently, however, the sound of the British guns firing caused them to realise with horror that it was their own. Soon afterwards, either through an order to search forwards, or through other guns joining in, the British barrage burst upon them in full force. Their position was deluged with shell. Roots were torn from the hedge and tossed in the air, shrapnel began to crack overhead. A tree

<sup>2</sup> Pte. C J Shang, D.C.M., M.M. (No 2504a; 47th Bn.). Clerk; of Cairns, Q'land, b Fortitude Valley, Q'land, 4 Aug., 1884.

<sup>3</sup> It is stated in Private Gallwey's diary that, in order to allow fire to be directed on the left, two Australians lay on the surface and allowed a Lewis gun to fire over them. Both were killed.

split and crashed. Fragments of steel swished along the ground and lay smoking. Men were being killed and wounded. Lieutenant Schulz, before he was wounded,<sup>4</sup> checked more than one attempt to retire, but, according to Gallwey, a surviving officer eventually gave the word to fall back on the New Zealand line. Some of the wounded implored the troops not to leave; one man begged to be shot before they did so. But the advanced line ran back, every man for himself, through the British barrage. Many were killed. Farther north, despite their efforts to hold their men, Captains Williams (47th) and Allen (45th) eventually caught sight of one another standing out alone along the Oostaverne "support line," from which their force had fled. "They would stand all the enemy fire you liked to give them," said Williams long afterwards, "but they would not put up with being shelled by their own guns." A remnant still occupied the old Oostaverne front line, but most went straight through to the Black Line, which the New Zealanders were still digging.

At headquarters of the 47th south of Messines, Lieutenant-Colonel Imlay<sup>5</sup> had from the first the greatest difficulty in ascertaining what had happened. His intelligence officer, Lieutenant Scott,<sup>6</sup> who had been sending excellent reports from an intermediate position, was killed when going across to the 45th for information. As almost all messages then ceased, Imlay sent up Lieutenant Bremner,<sup>7</sup> who succeeded in getting in touch with most of the organised remains of the 47th in the Oostaverne Line. When, as will be told later, the barrage was shortened by the Black Line commanders, this remnant also was brought back. During the night part of the 47th was reorganized behind the Black Line, but many men, finding no sign of their unit, went as far as the old British front line and slept there, worn out. In the morning they went up again to find their battalion.

This retreat occurred shortly before dusk, and created some anxiety for the New Zealand commanders in the Black Line.

<sup>4</sup> On being badly wounded in the face, he handed over command to Sergeant-Major W. Parry (Lottah, Tas.). To save the stretcher-bearers, he walked unassisted to the rear.

<sup>5</sup> Lieut.-Col. A. P. Imlay, D.S.O. Commanded 47th Bn., 1917/18. Mercantile manager, of Sydney; b. Comongin, Q'land, 1 Feb., 1885.

<sup>6</sup> Lieut. C. D. L. Scott, M.C., 47th Bn. Journalist; of Ipswich, Q'land, b. Ipswich, 15 Nov., 1891. Killed in action, 7 June, 1917.

<sup>7</sup> Capt. N. F. Bremner, D.S.O.; 47th Bn. Electrical mechanic, of Toowoomba, Q'land, b. Toowoomba, 23 Dec., 1891.

One of them, believing that the Australians had been driven from the Oosttaverne Line and that his own position would be attacked, asked for the barrage to be shortened to cover his troops, and between 8 and 9 o'clock, if not earlier, this was done. The barrage fell upon those of the 45th and 47th who still remained in "Owl Trench,"<sup>8</sup> and drove them out. On the right the shelling had caused part of the 37th Battalion (3rd Division) to fall back from the open north of the Douve, but part still held the first Oosttaverne trench south of Huns' Walk. Lieutenant Roadknight,<sup>9</sup> who had been sent up to ascertain its position, was then in charge, and Major Story,<sup>10</sup> in control at Bethléem Farm, received a message from him written at 8.40 p.m.



D Company on right, 47th Battalion on left, have gone and our own shells landing behind us on right and left. What shall we do?

To which Lieutenant Murdoch,<sup>11</sup> who had held the trench from the first, added:

Do you know what this barrage is for? Our men were driven out, as far as I can see, by our own artillery fire.

Major Story sent back the messenger with a verbal order for the 37th also to withdraw. It happened that a premature report of the falling back of the 37th had caused General Monash, after inquiry, to shorten the 3rd Division's barrage also, and at 9 o'clock the shells began to fall heavily on the part of the battalion that was still holding on. But shortly afterwards Major Story's messenger arrived, and Roadknight and Murdoch withdrew their men through their own barrage. The company of the 40th in the Douve valley on their flank, however, did not receive Story's order. Captain McVilly of the 40th, who with another company had been brought up to work on the Black Line, was horrified to hear that the barrage

<sup>8</sup> See Vol. XII, plate 341.

<sup>9</sup> Lieut. J. Roadknight, 37th Bn. School teacher; of Sale, Vic.; b. Johnsonville, Vic., 11 July, 1892. Killed in action, 12 Oct., 1917.

<sup>10</sup> Lieut.-Col. C. B. Story, V.D.; 37 Bn. Schoolmaster and Area Officer; of Ascot Vale, Vic.; b. Dromana, Vic., 16 July, 1883.

<sup>11</sup> Lieut. A. M. Murdoch, M.C.; 37 Bn. Clerk; of Camberwell, Vic.; b. Camberwell, 12 Nov., 1894.



was to shorten, and protested that the advanced company was still out. At the same time there came in from it Sergeant Cranswick,<sup>12</sup> sent by its only remaining officer, Lieutenant Loane,<sup>13</sup> to ask for orders. It was immediately brought back. Major Story, who had not wished the barrage to be shortened, asked his brigadier (McNicoll) first, that it should be lengthened to the afternoon's objective, and, later, that it should be still further lengthened so that the 37th might go back to the advanced line.

Thus, owing to the action of its own artillery—for which defects in the maps, over-eagerness of the infantry, over-anxiety of some of the staffs and commanders, and a dangerous degree of inaccuracy in the barrage were responsible—the whole of the final objective between the Blauwepoortbeek valley and the Douve had by 9 p.m. been left open to the enemy.

German narratives imply that the whole of the line thus left empty was reoccupied by German troops, but this is almost certainly wrong. The counter-attacking German troops, whom the 47th had in part repulsed, belonged to the 1st Guard Reserve and 5th Bavarian R.I. Regiments, which had been coming up throughout the afternoon. The 18th Bavarian I.R. was relieved that night by the III/1st Guard Reserve Regiment, which took over the Oostaverne Line in the Blauwepoortbeek valley.

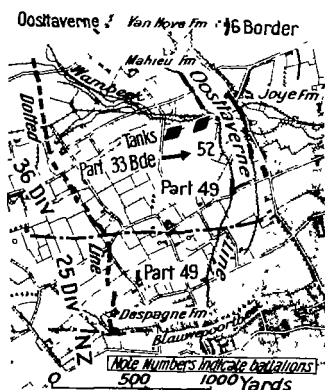
As a result of similar causes to those that forced the retirement near Huns' Walk, the northern section of the II Anzac troops was plunged into almost equal difficulties. Here the position had been strengthened since 5 p.m. After the capture of Van Hove Farm Captain Maxwell had asked the two unengaged tanks to move forward towards Joye Farm. While working down the Wambeek valley both became ditched, but, as they were in a position to serve as forts opposing any attack up the valley, their crews stayed and manned them throughout the night. Fragments of the 33rd Brigade, which came up and asked their way, were directed by Maxwell to fill the gaps. While seeking for such troops on his left flank, he obtained touch with some on the

<sup>12</sup> Lieut. T. G. Cranswick, M.C., D.C.M.; 40th Bn. Bank clerk; of Stanley, Tas.; b. Stanley, 8 Oct., 1893. Died of wounds, 18 Nov., 1920.

<sup>13</sup> Lieut. R. J. D. Loane, 40th Bn. Articled law clerk; of Devonport, Tas.; b. Latrobe, Tas., 20 Sept., 1895.

Black Dotted Line of the IX Corps. Although these could not come forward, they were a safeguard to the left.<sup>14</sup>

Since 5 p.m. the 13th Brigade's advanced line on the Wambeek had been troubled by the short-shooting of a heavy battery on its left and of eighteen-pounders on its right. Several messages had been sent asking for range to be lengthened, but it had not been altered up to 8.30 p.m., at which time, as we have seen, a withdrawal of some Australians near Huns' Walk caused the commander of the New Zealand sector of the Black Line to call down his barrage and shorten its range. Although the German artillery was shelling heavily at the same time, no movement of enemy troops was seen by the New Zealanders; but fragments of the 49th Battalion in the Blauwepoortbeek valley—and probably some of the 25th Division in their rear—did observe German infantry moving forward near the Oosttaerne Line blockhouses in that valley. Word spread that the enemy was counter-attacking.<sup>15</sup> At 8.5 the 47th Battalion, which was being attacked on Huns' Walk, asked for artillery-fire, and at 10.10 the artillery along almost the whole front of II Anzac was firing on its S.O.S. lines. On Maxwell's left at first only the foremost troops were shelled by their own guns, but on his right the shelling deluged the country in rear, even including parts of the Black Dotted Line. In a rearward strong-post of the Sherwood Foresters the officer of the Royal Engineers in charge of the digging was killed. The 6th Border were driven out of Van Hove Farm, and withdrew in rear of the Oosttaerne Line. Captain Maxwell

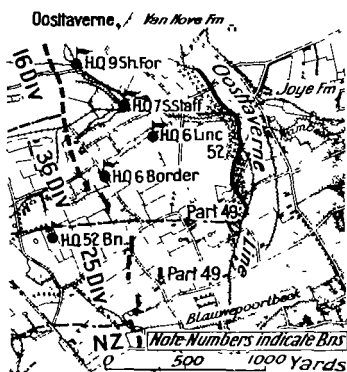


<sup>14</sup> The intelligence officer of the 33rd Brigade had told Maxwell that there were troops back along the railway line in the Wambeek valley. The 6th Border afterwards obtained touch here with the 12th Royal Irish Rifles holding the 36th Division's Black Dotted Line. These were forbidden by their orders from reinforcing in the Oosttaerne Line.

<sup>15</sup> The diary of the 1st Auckland (N.Z.) Battalion, dealing with the alarm of a German counter-attack at 8.30 p.m., says "Our own artillery appeared to fall short of the Green (i.e. Oosttaerne) Line, and the Australians came back through the Black Dotted Line and Black Line, where they reorganised. No enemy were observed from the Black Line."

brought back his men temporarily into the first Oosttaverne trench or, in some places, into the wire just short of it, and then, as repeated messages had failed to correct the artillery range, set out himself to headquarters to have it lengthened.

On his way Maxwell found the headquarters of two battalions of the 33rd Brigade—the 6th Border and the 6th Lincolnshire—and, after explaining the position as he knew it, he asked for such reinforcement as the front line needed. The officers and troops in that area were obviously uncertain of the position, and constantly apprehensive that the front line would give way. After delivering his message, Maxwell was returning past a battalion headquarters when he was surprised to hear the command, "Load!" "Fire!" "See them on the



right there!" Rushing forward with a furious question as to what was going on, Maxwell found himself facing a British battalion commander, who said that the line had fallen back and that he was directing fire on the advancing enemy. The young Tasmanian offered to go down to this target himself in order to prove that the men seen were not German; immediately afterwards a flare revealed them, and a patrol found them to be a party of British machine-gunners searching behind the lines for a new position.

This state of affairs behind the line gave rise to a period of extraordinary obscurity among the directing staffs. For nearly two hours there flew around the back area, and along telephone lines to all headquarters, rumour after rumour of withdrawal, and alternately contradictions.<sup>18</sup> The 25th Division brought back its barrage also. Not till shortly after

<sup>18</sup> At 8.15 the 1st N.Z. Brigade reported: "Many Australians came back through Black Dotted Line." At 8.40 a forward observation officer reported a strong counter-attack in progress. Later it was stated that the counter-attack had been stopped at the Black Dotted Line. A New Zealand battalion informed its brigade that it had been driven off the Black Dotted Line (actually two of its posts had to come back through being shelled). At 10.10 came reports that the 1st N.Z. Brigade was falling back, and also the 3rd and 4th Australian Divisions. Most of these messages were true of some small sector or portion of the troops but not of the front or troops in general.

10 o'clock was it definitely known that, although the troops at Huns' Walk had been shelled out by their own guns, those north of the Blauwepoortbeek were still holding on, waiting only for their guns to lift in order to finish consolidation. The corps commander, General Godley, was much disturbed by the action of his subordinates in bringing back the barrage, and ordered it to be again laid east of the Oosttaverne Line. "The 3rd and 4th Australian Divisions," his order continued, "will reoccupy all ground vacated."

Looking back after the event it is easy to see that this element of confusion in an operation singularly free from muddle was due to the extreme caution of General Plumer's plan. In order to make certain that the main objective when once gained should be retained against the formidable counter-attacks expected, a defensive system—the Black and Black Dotted Lines—was established there independent of whatever line might be reached farther ahead. The advanced (Green) line was taken and held by other troops, but it was the staffs of divisions holding the Black Line who, under the now nominal superintendence of the army corps, really controlled the artillery covering the Green Line. For the sake of the safety of the ridge this "leap-frog" organisation, usually a device employed only for an attack, was maintained for several days. No doubt the Black Line system made the ridge safe. The most powerful counter-attacks could have been beaten off. But no counter-attack came near it.

No counter-attack in the Blauwepoortbeek valley is mentioned in the available German records. The Germans, however, apparently received some impression of a British attack, for the Bavarian Official History refers to an assault "with masses of infantry and tanks" about 7 o'clock. It is conceivable that the bombardment was due to this mythical threat. There is evidence, however, that some of the enemy did advance in the Blauwepoortbeek valley, and were driven back by the shortened barrage.

The troops who actually had to deal with the counter-attacks made elsewhere this night were those in the advanced line, and they had to do this with the artillery constantly acting at the call of other divisions behind them, which were unaware of their situation and were charged with a separate and vital duty. The fact that the staff of the 25th Division knew little of the Australians, and did not fully trust their battle discipline, added an additional complication. It is likely that

some of the New Zealand staff, also, had less faith in the Australians than in their own troops, and, although General Holmes and the brigadiers of the 4th Division shared their respective headquarters with their New Zealand colleagues, and no staffs ever worked with better mutual understanding, this system was bound to break down. For the present, however, the defect remained unremedied.

General Godley's order to reoccupy all ground vacated was intended to apply mainly to the vacated sector at Huns' Walk,<sup>17</sup> concerning which the facts were by then fairly well ascertained. The failure in the Blauwepoortbeek valley was only just becoming known to the commander of the 13th Brigade, Brigadier-General Glasgow,<sup>18</sup> and the gap there was supposed to be a comparatively small one. At 10.10, hearing of the thinness of Maxwell's line, he sent two companies of the 51st Battalion to reinforce the 52nd; it was not till 10.35 that he learnt that hardly any part of the 49th had reached its objective in the valley.<sup>19</sup> He then despatched the rest of the 51st to reinforce it and to close the valley to the enemy by throwing back a flank towards the New Zealanders in the Black Line. The 51st being thus split up, its commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Ridley,<sup>20</sup> was sent forward to control the 52nd, Captain Stubbings, however, remaining at its headquarters to assist him. Meanwhile the 13th Machine Gun Company under Captain Duchatel,<sup>21</sup> and part of the 13th Field Company under Lieutenant Norman<sup>22</sup>—with a company of the 6th Lincolnshire on the north and Berriman's party of the 49th on the south—formed a rearward line of strong-posts on either side of the spur between the Wambeek and Blauwepoortbeek. This line was in front of the Black Dotted Line held by the 11th Cheshire, but connected with it in the

<sup>17</sup> His order at 10.45 p.m. said "south of the Blauwepoortbeek."

<sup>18</sup> Urgent messages had been sent by Glasgow, asking for news, but headquarters of the 49th itself knew little. Lieutenant R. Colvin (Rockhampton, Q'land; died 9 March, 1925), signal officer of the 49th, who had been sent forward to get information, was hit.

<sup>19</sup> Lieutenant R. F. Finlason (Boulder, W. Aust.), intelligence officer of the 13th Brigade, brought in about this time an accurate report of the situation.

<sup>20</sup> Lieut.-Col. J. C. T. E. C. Ridley, D.S.O. Brigade Major, 13th Inf. Bde., 1916/17; Commanded 51st Bn., 1917, 45th Bn., 1918. Officer of Aust. Permanent Forces; of Gympie, Q'land; b. Melbourne, 10 Jan., 1881.

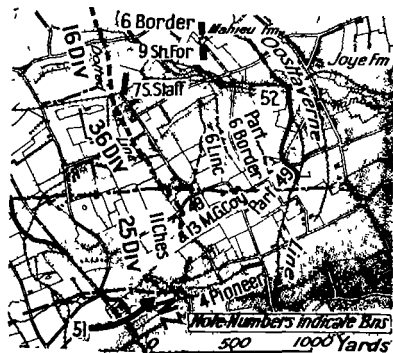
<sup>21</sup> Major C. F. Duchatel, M.C.; 13th M.G. Coy. Mining student; of Charters Towers, Q'land; b. Albury, N.S.W., 2 Apr., 1892.

<sup>22</sup> Capt E. P. Norman, M.C.; 12th Fld. Coy. Engrs. Civil engineer, of Scone, N.S.W.; b. Scone, 17 March, 1887.

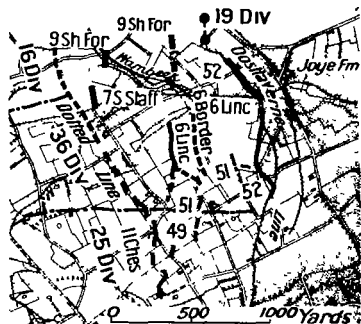
Blauwepoortbeek valley. Captain Calder's<sup>23</sup> company of the 4th Pioneers, working to the exceedingly effective standard of Australian pioneers, dug during the night a communication trench 1,000 yards long past Despagne Farm down Blauwepoortbeek valley to a point in the German wire.<sup>24</sup> In this wire they captured two Germans attempting to mend the entanglement. It was afterwards realised that the Oosttaverne trench here was held by the Germans, the southern flank of the 13th Brigade not being so far south as had been reported.<sup>25</sup> A man of the 52nd,<sup>26</sup> who tried to return

to the front that way, walked straight into the enemy and was captured. The forward end of the communication trench, therefore, remained for the time being unfinished and unused.

About dusk parties of the enemy were seen approaching the line north of Captain Maxwell's position, and at 11.30 a feeble counter-attack took place on his flank. Flares could be seen and machine-gun fire heard further north. A few Germans entered the



The exact position of 33rd Brigade units is not recorded, but the trenches here shown appear in next day's air-photographs.



<sup>23</sup> Major J. B. Calder, M.C.; 4th Pioneer Bn. Licensed surveyor; of Rose Park and Lower Mitcham, S. Aust.; b. Glenelg, S. Aust., 23 Nov., 1891.

<sup>24</sup> A communication trench was also dug by this battalion past the southern edge of Messines. Major C. C. Riddell (Melbourne) of the 12th Field Company, though stunned by a shell on his way forward, reconnoitred the foremost area of the 12th Brigade with a view to directing this and other work.

<sup>25</sup> Some party of Australians visited the Oosttaverne Line in this gap, but withdrew to the north-west. Another party reached the wire and withdrew. Their tracks are clearly shown in aeroplane photographs. The parties were possibly those of the 49th Battalion with Lieutenant Bearman (see p. 634), or patrols of the 51st.

<sup>26</sup> Pte W. J. E. Cheeseman (No. 2147; 52nd Bn). Farmer; of Deeford, Q'land; b. London, 28 Oct., 1890.

now empty length of the Oosttaverne Line on Maxwell's left, but ran back on the approach of the patrol which was maintained there. During the night the company of the 6th Lincolnshire came up, as promised, and Maxwell put them into the old German front line on his right, intentionally mixing them with his own men on account of their apparently tired and nervy condition. In the early morning of June 8th he at last gained touch on the north in the Oosttaverne Line with the 57th Brigade (19th Division), which had seized the trenches at Oosttaverne and was patrolling southward along them.

The counter-attack during the night on Maxwell's flank and on the British east of Oosttaverne was made by the 11th German Division, which was hurried forward into a gap between the 7th and 1st Guard Reserve Divisions. The 7th Division, from Gheluwe, had originally been directed to retake Wytschaete. But it had farther to go than the 1st Guard Reserve, and after marching eleven miles in great heat it found the nearest crossings of the Ypres-Comines canal barraged by British artillery. It therefore altered its course, but was seen from the air and fired on while still east of the canal. It had consequently to be reorganised, and arrived very late. On being placed under the orders of the 35th Division, it received conflicting orders from that division and from corps headquarters. The corps, however, decided that the 35th Division's orders should operate, and the 7th Division was directed to attack, together with the 35th and 2nd, the Messines-Wytschaete Ridge. One battalion of it, the III/165th I.R., advanced about 7.30 p.m. towards Joye Farm (on Maxwell's front), but only occupied "the neighbourhood of" the Oosttaverne Line.

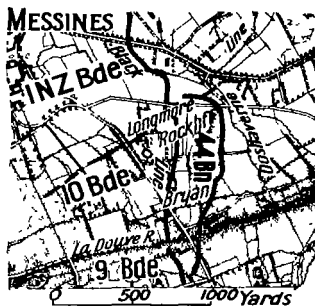
On its being reported that the British had already pierced this line "on a fairly wide front," General von Laffert, commanding the XIX German Corps, was actually in favour of withdrawing at once across the canal and the Lys River on the whole battle-front. This course was rejected. The 11th Division was brought up during the night and placed between the 7th and 1st Guard Reserve, and with the 7th it "succeeded in closing the gap at Oosttaverne."<sup>27</sup> It was evidently reported that the 7th had retaken the Oosttaverne Line in this area, but this, so far as the observation of the 13th Australian Brigade went, was not the case.

Active measures were in train to oust the Germans from the section of the objective still uncaptured south of the 13th Brigade. The retaking of the "ground vacated," ordered by General Godley at 10.45 p.m. on the 7th, was to be effected by the 3rd and 4th Divisions each pushing up their inner flank; the 3rd Division putting in the 44th Battalion, held till then in reserve

<sup>27</sup> Crown Prince Rupprecht, *Mein Kriegstagebuch*, Vol. II, p. 190. The references to the 11th Division are based on an account courteously furnished by the *Reichsarchiv*.

in the catacombs under Hill 63; the 4th Division similarly throwing in the 48th.<sup>28</sup> Both these battalions contained Western Australians—the 44th (temporarily lent to the 10th Brigade under General McNicoll) being as yet untried except in raids, the 48th, which was employed by its own brigade (12th, General Robertson), being a veteran of Pozières and Bullecourt. To avoid repetition of the previous night's confusion, Godley ordered that there should be no barrage on, or short of, the objective; the standing bombardment beyond it would merely be thickened at the hour of the attack. The commanders of the 3rd and 4th Divisions and their brigadiers were to confer as to the time of starting. General Monash and Holmes decided upon 3 a.m.

General Monash had on the previous morning warned Brigadier-General Cannan (11th Brigade) that the 44th Battalion might be required to support the 10th Brigade, which was believed to have lost heavily. Major Connelly,<sup>29</sup> brigade major of the 10th Brigade, spent the night on the Black Line arranging for the attack now ordered, and the 44th was on its jumping-off line in time; but on its left it could find no trace of the 48th, with which it had been ordered to find touch before the start. It accordingly advanced alone to the wire of the Oosttaverne Line, but there Captain Rockliff, an experienced Anzac leader,<sup>30</sup> stopped the advance, and Captain Longmore<sup>31</sup> safeguarded the left by swinging his supporting company on that flank back towards the Black Line. On the right Captain Bryan's<sup>32</sup> company re-occupied the trench, partly dug on



<sup>28</sup> An attempt to ascertain the position, and, if possible, secure the ground, was first to be made by patrols. A patrol of the 40th found that the Green Line immediately north of the Douve was unoccupied.

<sup>29</sup> Major E. W. Connelly, D.S.O. Brigade Major, 10th Aust. Inf. Bde., 1917; G.S.O. (2), 3rd Aust. Div., 1918. Barrister-at-law; of Bendigo, Vic.; b. Bendigo, 18 Sept., 1888. Died of wounds, 9 Sept., 1918.

<sup>30</sup> He had served in the 11th Battalion at the Landing, in the raid on Gaba Tepe, and at Leane's Trench (see Vols. I and II).

<sup>31</sup> Capt. C. Longmore, 44th Bn. Member of Aust. Permanent Forces; of Perth, W. Aust., b. Melbourne, 8 Nov., 1887.

<sup>32</sup> Capt. W. T. Bryan, 44th Bn. Public servant; of Perth, W. Aust.; b. Perth, 28 Feb., 1881. Killed in action, 8 June, 1917.



the day before by the 37th and 40th, leading back to the flank of the 9th Brigade in the Douve valley.<sup>33</sup> In the shell-holes around Rockliff's company the dead and wounded of the 37th and of the Germans lay thickly,<sup>34</sup> and before long the new troops suffered the same experience as their predecessors: their own barrage came down upon them. Rockliff at once drew back the line a short distance and dug a new trench, thus escaping with only two or three casualties. Until the following afternoon his new position was undisturbed by the artillery of either side; but efforts to get the fire of the supporting guns lifted from the Oosttaverne Line ahead of him were unsuccessful. On June 9th and even on the 10th the troops on this flank were kept out of their objective by their own artillery.<sup>35</sup>

The position of the 44th after its advance was promptly and accurately reported both from the ground and from the air. At the same time it became known at the headquarters concerned that the 48th had not attacked; its orders had been received too late. At dusk on the previous night two of its companies had been sent to strengthen the battalions of its brigade that had made the afternoon attack, Lieutenant Stabback's<sup>36</sup> to the 45th and Captain Mayersbeth's<sup>37</sup> to the 47th. Shortly before midnight, on receipt of the order to attack, the remaining two were similarly distributed, Lieutenant Allen's<sup>38</sup> going to the 45th and Captain Cumming's to the 47th. At this stage the commanders of those two battalions (occupying blockhouses on the southern shoulder

<sup>33</sup> It was ordered that the 37th should "co-operate" with the 44th in this advance. The order, in that form, does not seem to have reached Major Story, but, even if it had, the companies of the 37th were so exhausted, and reorganisation in the dark on the Black Line was so difficult, that the instruction would not have been easy to carry out. Captain Giblin's company of the 40th was returned to its own battalion. On receipt of further orders, the 37th went up during the night of June 8 and reinforced the 44th, but, in consequence of the decision to relieve its brigade, was immediately withdrawn.

<sup>34</sup> Here Private W. H. Opie (Claremont, W. Aust.) of the 44th excited admiration by his brave work as a stretcher-bearer. His mate was shot through the head, but Opie continued to bring in men until himself wounded.

<sup>35</sup> Some of the guns whose firing here gave so much trouble were those of an Australian (army) field artillery brigade; others belonged to heavy batteries. At 11 p.m. on the 9th Lieutenant R. Skinner (Geraldton, W. Aust.), now commanding Captain Longmore's company, sent word that he was in shell-holes close to the Green Line, and would move forward as soon as the artillery lengthened. "Can anything be done," he asked, "to lengthen the artillery fire?"

<sup>36</sup> Lieut. J. W. Stabback, M.C.; 48th Bn. Chemist; of Randwick, N.S.W.; b. Orange, N.S.W., 13 Apr., 1894.

<sup>37</sup> Capt. J. W. Mayersbeth, 48th Bn. Telegraph linesman; of Northam, W. Aust.; b. Lambeth, London, 12 Feb., 1892. Killed in action, 12 June, 1917.

<sup>38</sup> Brigadier A. R. Allen, 48th Bn. Indent Agent. of Adelaide; b. Nunhead, London, 20 Oct., 1888.

of Messines Ridge) were under the impression that these reinforcements were to dig on the Black Line until dawn (4 a.m.), and would probably then be ordered to advance. The two earlier companies were thus employed digging in, and the later ones had just arrived, and their commanders were asking for instructions at the two headquarters to which they had been directed, when, between 2.40 and 2.50 a.m., messengers stumbled in with orders that the attack should be launched at 3 o'clock. Lieutenant Stabback, with the 45th, hurried to get his company lined out, but although his men were ready at 2.55 no other company was there, and he returned to tell Colonel Herring (45th) that the advance had been rendered impossible. Captain Cumming, who was being instructed by Colonel Imlay (47th), received notice of zero hour a little later than Stabback, and both Imlay and he recognised that his troops could not be formed up in the time available. Imlay therefore told him to line out his company in the Black Line, beside Mayersbeth's and the reorganised portion of the 47th, and then to prepare for the attack by pushing forward his men—by two's and three's, if necessary, and from shell-hole to shell-hole—as far as he could. Meanwhile Imlay would arrange for a new bombardment, and when it descended Cumming should launch the final advance.

Cumming duly led his men<sup>39</sup> to the Black Line, and found Mayersbeth. The front was exceedingly quiet, and therefore, after widely extending their men, they simply climbed out of the trench and advanced in line. The sky was now light and shots began to ring out from unseen German snipers ahead. A distant machine-gun or two, and presently a field-gun, opened. North of Huns' Walk the line of men, after going 150 yards, came, to its complete surprise, upon a very old trench, not marked on the maps, possibly a relic of the First Battle of Messines. It afforded sufficient shelter for



<sup>39</sup> He had with him also half of Lieutenant Allen's company, which had missed its way to the 45th.

a jumping-off trench; the troops settled into it, and the remnant—about 80—of the 47th, reorganised under Captain Williams, joined them. Meanwhile Lieutenant Stoerke<sup>40</sup> of Cumming's company moved out to patrol, taking Sergeant O'Brien<sup>41</sup> and a private named Wall.<sup>42</sup>

In front there was a dip, and, although many snipers, and a machine-gun in some trees north of Huns' Walk, were firing spitefully, the three men worked down the depression to Oxygen Trench, 200 yards ahead, and returned with the news that it was empty. Cumming at once sent a platoon by the same route to occupy it. From there a row of willow trees, somewhat widely spaced, gave sufficient cover to allow the same three scouts to reach the first Oosttaverne Trench (Owl Trench). They reported this, too, to be empty, although fierce machine-gun fire came from the clump of trees beyond. Cumming sent forward another platoon, this time in extended order. As it reached the Oosttaverne Line entanglement, a German machine-gun on its left opened fire, but the troops got through with only four casualties. Cumming now brought up the rest of his company.<sup>43</sup> Mayersbeth's company followed, and Captain Williams (47th) advanced to Oxygen Trench in support and to guard the flanks.

Meanwhile the same patrol of three went out to discover the supposed support trench, and the enemy. The Germans were now almost silent, and this silence together with the absence of any visible sign of the enemy, led the Australians to suspect a trap. But the three scouts reached the existent portion of the Oosttaverne support trench, and, on their report that no Germans were there, Cumming sent on thither a platoon of his company and one of Mayersbeth's. These were heavily fired on but reached the trench with few casualties, and found there a Lewis gun team of the 47th which had not retired when the artillery shelled out the rest of the troops on the previous night.

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<sup>40</sup> Lieut. C. W. Tanner, M.C. (served as C. W. Stoerke); 48th Bn. Farmer; of Orroroo, S. Aust.; b. Edmonton, London, 9 Aug., 1895.

<sup>41</sup> Sgt. M. P. O'Brien, M.M. (No. 2918; 48th Bn.). Grocer; of Donald, Vic.; b. Carron, Vic., 1879. Killed in action, 11 June, 1917.

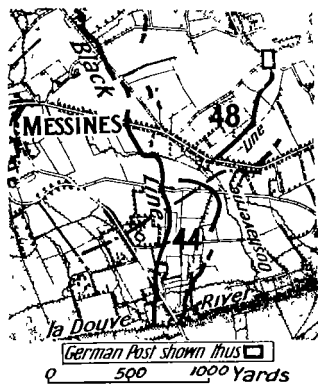
<sup>42</sup> L/Cpl. G. T. Wall, M.M. (No. 2939; 48th Bn.). Labourer; of Leederville, W. Aust.; b. Gwalia, W. Aust., 1881.

<sup>43</sup> That is to say, the platoon first sent to Oxygen Trench. The 48th was still short of men after First Bullecourt, and the company was organised into two platoons.

For the fourth time the same three went out, but they were presently seen returning, O'Brien and Wall supporting between them their wounded officer. Not a shot was then being fired at them. At this stage there came up to the Oosttaverne Line the two companies of the 48th (under Lieutenants Stabback and Allen) that had been allotted to the 45th. At 3 a.m., when Stabback had reported the failure of the arrangements for the attack, Colonel Herring had instructed him to withdraw his troops temporarily to cover. But while carrying out this order Stabback had seen the advance of the other companies to their jumping-off trench. Thinking that they were about to advance unsupported, he had obtained leave to visit Colonel Imlay (47th), who suggested that Stabback's companies should join in the operation on the left flank of Mayersbeth and Cumming. At that moment word had arrived from Cumming that Owl Trench had been found empty. Stabback, sending word to Herring, at once led the two companies forward.

They came up in loose formation, under erratic machine-gun fire but without a casualty. Like his colleagues, suspecting a trap, Stabback probed to the left along the first Oosttaverne trench. The blockhouse taken by Muir of the 45th the night before was found empty, but a little farther down the trench could be seen the helmets of Germans, and sniping shots were received from close range. Stabback organised a bombing party and suggested to Colonel Herring that it should attack down the trench towards the Blauwepoortbeek. Herring, however, ordered that this operation should be postponed until after dusk; meanwhile, he said, he would send Captain Allen (45th) to organise it.

Thus, north of Huns' Walk, through an exceptionally fine combination of enterprise and cool judgment on the part of battalion and company leaders, the objectives seized in the original attack had been reoccupied before the Germans had taken advantage of the previous



night's withdrawal. South of Huns' Walk, it is true, the British barrage had kept the 44th just outside the objective, and not until late in the morning did the forward troops of that battalion know that the 48th had now come up and gone far beyond their left. The left of the 44th was then ordered to advance and join up, and about 1 o'clock, in bright daylight, with barely a rifle-shot or shell going over, the left company in two waves went forward 150 yards and, to its great surprise, found the linked shell-holes, that represented the first Oosttaverne trench, empty except for the crowded dead of the evening before. It did not advance to the Oosttaverne support line of which, indeed, on that front very little existed.

The available German records make no mention of these attacks. It is evident that the higher commanders understood that the Oosttaverne Line was still in German possession, and from the regimental histories it would seem probable that even the local commanders believed that their troops were in it—a circumstance which would explain why the Australians in the line suffered so little from German artillery-fire. The German troops were new-comers in the area; most of them had never seen the Oosttaverne Line, and, occupying shell-holes, blockhouses, and farms near its support "trench," some of them may have supposed that they occupied the line itself.

At any rate the staff of Crown Prince Rupprecht's group of armies imagined that the line was theirs, and on June 8 the sole question was whether they should continue to hold it "as long as possible," a course favoured by von Kuhl; or withdraw to the "Houthem-Warneton Line" a mile in rear, close in front of the canal, as now suggested by Fourth Army; or fall back at once on the "Flandern Stellung" beyond the Lys and the canal—the course to which Crown Prince Rupprecht himself now leant. It was admitted that the Oosttaverne Line was in many ways inferior to the position on Messines ridge; but the recapture of the heights, which on June 7 was to be achieved "at all costs," was now becoming recognised as impossible, and Crown Prince Rupprecht feared that even the Oosttaverne Line must be given up as soon as the British had advanced their artillery. Decision was, however, deferred until the situation should become clearer.

Actually, in the southern half of the battlefield, only one fraction of the Oosttaverne Line within the limits of the British attack still remained in German hands —in the valley of the Blauwepoortbeek. With the valley commanded by half the 51st, elements of the 49th (13th Brigade), the 11th Cheshire, and behind them the New Zealanders, there was no danger; but the difficulty was to ascertain the position and

**Day of June 8,  
on northern  
front**

round off the line. The 49th Battalion, which was supposed to be lying in the valley, had been ordered to swing up its right in co-operation with the attack (which did not occur) at 3 a.m. by the 48th. But the 49th had suffered terrible loss in the first assault; its only organised party was the handful of men holding the refused southern flank of Captain Maxwell's position. It is true that its commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Paul, was informed that he might use for the attack at 3 a.m. the two reinforcing companies of the 51st;<sup>44</sup> but the order was not issued until 1 o'clock, and, as the precise situation of the troops in the Blauwepoortbeek valley could not be ascertained in the dark, it had no result.

Major-General William Holmes, commanding the 4th Australian Division, was not one who would be content to allow a situation to remain vague if he could personally unravel it. At 3.50, hearing that no troops except those of the 3rd Division had advanced at 3 o'clock, and being unable to find out the reason, he had motored to the headquarters of his two brigadiers, Robertson of the 12th and Glasgow of the 13th.<sup>45</sup> On finding that they could tell him nothing, "Well, now," he said, "it seems the only way is for us to go up and see. Get your hats and come along." They went to Messines, and there learnt from Colonels Imlay and Herring of the first stages of the 48th Battalion's progress. The position of the 13th Brigade (Glasgow's) had then been further ascertained by Colonel Ridley, newly sent to the 52nd, who as his first act went with Captain Stubbings round Maxwell's front. The 52nd Battalion, with parts of the 33rd Brigade scattered among it, still held practically the whole of the 33rd Brigade's objective, but only 200 yards of its own. It was decided, with the concurrence of General Godley, that the IX Corps should be asked to take over at dusk its proper front, and that the 52nd, on relief, should move round to the south of the 49th and, with it, drive the Germans out of the gap on the Blauwepoortbeek. The commander of the 33rd Brigade at first refused to believe that the Australians were

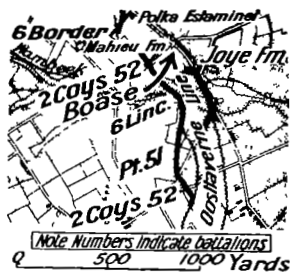
<sup>44</sup> Those of Captains C. E. A. Cooke (Boulder, W. Aust.; killed in action on 24 Apr., 1918) and E. D. McBurnie (South Melbourne).

<sup>45</sup> General Glasgow, himself an outstanding "front-line" leader, has stated that to him and to his brigade-major, Major R. Morell, these five days at Messines were the most harassing in the war.

holding his proper sector, but Glasgow convinced him by personally going round the front with one of the British battalion commanders. The 4th Division's request was therefore agreed to.

During the day the enemy's effort on and north of Maxwell's front was feeble. There was, it is true, evidence that a large body of Germans was lying somewhere east of the Oosttaverne Line on Maxwell's left, and they continually tried to establish a line close enough to attempt a counter-attack. After the artillery had ceased to fire short, Maxwell had re-established his advanced line near Joye Farm, interspersing posts of the 6th Lincolnshire with those of Australians. About 8 a.m. a column of British infantry in fours had marched down to Polka Estaminet, a little beyond his left, and he had arranged that they should link with his flank by means of a chain of posts along and east of the first Oosttaverne trench. In placing these they routed out from shell-holes some Germans, who fell back on Van Hove Farm and began to snipe. One of Maxwell's men, going out to a position from which he could snipe in return, ran into 80 of these Germans, who had been lying in shell-holes on the 52nd's left front and shooting into the rear of the advanced posts of the Lincolnshire near Joye Farm.

Maxwell thereupon arranged with the British commander on his left that each should send a party about 20 strong to cut off these Germans. Lieutenant Boase<sup>46</sup> (52nd) led the party from Maxwell's front (Odour Trench). They walked straight over to the Germans, fought them with bombs for a minute or two, easily out-throwing them, and then drove



<sup>46</sup> Lieut. L. C. Boase, D.S.O., M.C.; 52nd Bn Insurance inspector, of Brisbane, b. Gympie, Q'land, 6 July, 1888

them off helter-skelter, bombing them with German bombs and shooting them down. Few appeared to escape, but the enemy still showed much persistence and individual bravery in trying to build up a line. Small parties kept trickling forward over the spur north of the Wambeek, and in the afternoon, when their concentration appeared dangerous, Maxwell fired the S.O.S. signal. As the barrage thus called for did not fall, he obtained touch with the artillery by telephone.<sup>47</sup> The bombardment then laid down broke up this concentration, the Germans running back over the ridge. Some of Maxwell's men, going out to search for their own wounded, found German dead lying thickly about the shell-holes, and brought back 40 prisoners. The Lincolnshire had beaten off part of the same German attack. Thus ended the enemy's activity in that quarter so far as the Australians were concerned.<sup>48</sup>

Meanwhile, in view of the success of the whole offensive, Generals Godley and Monash were already preparing for those local improvements of the line which would naturally follow. Chief among these was the capture of the Oostaverne Line immediately north and south of the Douve and at the Potterie Farm. The heavy artillery was accordingly ordered to bombard the Potterie system from 6 to 6.30 p.m. That afternoon, however, was a much disturbed one on the 3rd Division's front. Reports reaching General Monash indicated that the 44th Battalion was not where he believed it to be, in line with the 48th on Huns' Walk.<sup>49</sup> He pressed for precise information, but it was difficult to obtain; although the 3rd Division perhaps surpassed other Australian divisions in the careful carrying out of orders by subordinates, it lacked as yet their general high standard of personal supervision in battle by commanding officers. Well trained though its leaders were, some of them (as those whose practice was different often complained) were content to acquiesce in the

<sup>47</sup> A telephone line had been run forward to the Australian position by the 9th Sherwood Foresters in support.

<sup>48</sup> A small attack at dusk (about 9 p.m.) that day was, however, reported by the 9th Sherwood Foresters.

<sup>49</sup> This was before the left of the 44th moved forward to join the 48th.



theory, with which General Monash possibly agreed, that the commander's duty in time of battle was to remain strictly at his headquarters.<sup>50</sup> Thus, in too high a proportion of units, reconnaissance at critical times, or even during the pauses in an action, tended to be left to intelligence or other staff officers, who did not carry with them the powers of decision and of spurring to effort, which officers in command would have possessed.<sup>51</sup>

On this occasion Lieutenant-Colonel Peck, G.S.O. (2) of the division, was sent. Formerly commander of the 14th Battalion, Peck was one of the best officers in the A.I.F. While he was on the way to the advanced command posts behind this difficult corner, there began a German bombardment never to be forgotten in the 10th Brigade. Lieutenant-Colonel Mansbridge of the 44th, Major Maudsley<sup>52</sup> of the 38th, and Major Story of the 37th occupied advanced headquarters near Schnitzel and Bethléem Farms, where the Black Line descended the southern shoulder of Messines Ridge, ending in a carefully planned redoubt dug by the 38th Battalion in the Douve valley. In spite of their weariness, the 37th, 38th, 39th, and 40th Battalions, and pioneers and engineers, were still at work on the new trench-system and its communications. Four German airmen, who had been over, must have easily marked down the new works; and the 3rd Division and the New Zealanders were now to suffer some of those results



*New trenches dug by 3rd and 4th Aust. Divns. and N.Z. Divn. are shown by thick lines: the front line is hachured.*

<sup>50</sup> To what extent commanders should expose themselves in battle has been constantly debated since Plutarch in the first century of our era discussed (in his life of Pelopidas) the then current saying that "a good general should die of old age." The practice of the A.I.F., however, subjected good colonels to many risks.

<sup>51</sup> On this occasion the brigade-majors of the two engaged brigades gave magnificent service. Major T. F. Borwick of the 9th was indefatigable in reconnaissance. Major E. W. Connelly of the 10th, with his brigadier, McNicoll (who was hampered by an old leg wound), were badly gassed on the night of the 6th, but Connelly worked at the Black Line throughout the heavy barrages on the night of the 7th.

<sup>52</sup> Major A. J. A. Maudsley, 38th Bn. Accountant, of Melbourne, b. Melbourne, 22 Oct., 1881. Killed in action, 31 Aug., 1918.

which afterwards caused the British to avoid (as the Germans already did) the digging of continuous trenches on a battle-field. From about noon the German artillery massed on the southern flank began to bombard the southern shoulder of the ridge. Colonel Mansbridge, apprehending a counter-attack, was rendered doubly anxious by General Godley's rigid instruction that the barrage must not in any circumstances be brought back on to the Oosttaverne Line. He was told,<sup>53</sup> however, that if the Germans penetrated his line he must rely upon machine-guns and trench-mortars to deal with them, and that these were being sent up to him. About this time the German bombardment became intense, and at 3.10 the headquarters in rear were shocked by the arrival at the pigeon-loft of a bird with a message purporting to come from the 44th:

We are driven out of trenches. Wires all cut.

Shortly afterwards an observing officer of the 3rd Division reported that white flares were being sent up in the direction of the 44th's sector. General Monash at once informed the chief-of-staff of the army corps, Brigadier-General Gwynn, adding his opinion that the Germans had established themselves in the knot of the Oosttaverne Line trenches south of Huns' Walk. General Godley's rigid order against shortening the artillery barrage, Monash said, prevented him from dealing with this intrusion. Gwynn maintained Godley's order, but advised that the existing barrage should be thickened. At 3.58 word was received from the senior officer of the 38th Battalion, Major Maudsley, on the Black Line, that the position there was quiet and nothing was known of any reason for the pigeon message. An hour later an observer reported that Germans could be seen massing to attack the 48th, north of Huns' Walk, but not the 44th south of it, and that the Black Line had been "blown to blazes." And at 6.15 the 44th reported that it was still holding its proper front. Captain Rockliff, who was in its forward line throughout, afterwards stated—

The 44th's line was at no time in danger. . . . It was all the time perfectly sound. The messages and rumours which got back were unfounded, and it is not clearly known where they came from.

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<sup>53</sup> By Brigadier-General McNicoll, at 2.47 p.m.

Colonel Mansbridge, the battalion commander, a veteran of Anzac, said afterwards that the alarming message was sent without his knowledge or authority. It is conceivable, however, that it came from someone at his headquarters, which was in the open and suffered nerve-wracking bombardment,<sup>84</sup> being driven from shell-hole to shell-hole.<sup>85</sup>

The bombardment increased again shortly after 5 o'clock. Captains Fairweather and Trebilcock (38th), holding the Black Line in the Douve valley, reported that the dust and smoke hid everything. At 6.25 Fairweather sent word that the Germans were counter-attacking in force "on the right of the Black Line." He was a reliable officer, and apparently meant only that there were signs of such an attack in front of the 9th Brigade on his right; but his brigadier and divisional commander naturally assumed him to mean that the Germans had penetrated the advanced (Green) line in his own sector, in the Douve valley, and were attacking the Black Line. General Monash had again at 4.45 consulted corps headquarters as to bringing back the barrage if the Germans got through, but had received the same instruction as before—the barrage must be kept east of the Oosttaverne Line. It was laid down there in great strength until about 8.20, when both brigades asked for it to slacken.

Colonel Peck had then come back with his report. Through a tremendous shelling he had reached and returned from the advanced command posts. He brought definite information that Captain Rockliff and three and a half companies of the 44th were holding the advanced line, with the 37th and 38th on the Black Line in support. Just before Peck reached him, Colonel Mansbridge had learned from Rockliff about the Germans massing opposite the 48th, and Peck himself had seen not only these but distant German observers on the tower of Warneton church, apparently directing the bombardment. Except for the obvious inability

<sup>84</sup> In these barrages the work of Captain R. L. Kenihan, medical officer of the 44th, who himself was wounded but carried on, and of the whole medical personnel, was especially heavy. The conduct of Captains J. S. Yule (R.M.O., 37th), W. J. Clark (40th), K. S. Parker (45th), H. Powell (50th), and several other medical officers, and of Chaplains J. E. N. Osborn (35th) and J. Best (39th) was also recorded with admiration. (Kenihan belonged to Millswood, S. Aust.; Yule to Kalamunda, W. Aust.; Clark to Hobart; Parker to Manly, N.S.W.; Powell to Malvern, S. Aust.; Osborn to Toowoomba, Q'land; Best to Ballarat, Vic.)

<sup>85</sup> Colonel Mansbridge was badly shaken by the overwhelming strain of this day, and was never afterwards really fit for active service. He was subsequently sent to England for staff duties.

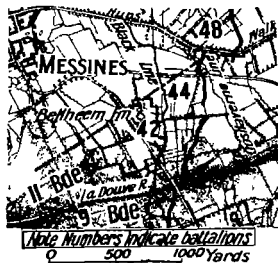
of the supporting counter-batteries to keep down this fire, all was well with the 3rd Division's front.

German narratives, especially the regimental histories, speak of frequent English "attacks" on the Oostaverne Line in the Douve sector, and it is evident that bombardments of that line, and movements of working or carrying parties, were interpreted as assaults. A British bombardment, which itself was sometimes caused by a German flare signal being mistaken for a British, would be immediately answered by the German artillery, which imagined that its infantry was being attacked. Thus the German bombardment after 5 o'clock was apparently in response partly to the barrage quickly thrown upon the enemy opposite the 48th, and partly to the British bombardment of the Potterie.

Half-an-hour after Peck had made his report, another tremendous bombardment broke out, "the heaviest we have yet heard," as a diary of the 3rd Divisional Headquarters notes. This was mainly to the north of the 3rd Divisional front; but it was nevertheless becoming evident that the forward troops of the 3rd Division, who, with the New Zealanders, were suffering the constant bombardment of the British flank, must before long be relieved. The 3rd Division alone had had to struggle through the horror of the approach march in Ploegsteert Wood. It was now General Monash's intention that both the 9th and 10th Brigades should relieve their tired front-line battalions by their support ones, which were fresher and stronger; and in preparation for this he ordered them to give their support battalions a few hours' rest.

The order, however, had barely been issued when, in conversation with Brigadier-General McNicoll, he learnt of the condition of the 10th Brigade. In the heavy shelling of the afternoon its front-line and support battalions alike had suffered heavily. They could muster for effective work not more than 250 men each, and those were tired and strained. Rest and reorganisation seemed necessary before the brigade would be of value, and General Monash therefore decided to withdraw it right back to the Nieppe area. The 11th Brigade would take over its front; the 9th Brigade must arrange its own reliefs. General Cannan (11th

**Night of June 8—  
Relief of 10th  
Brigade**



Brigade) kept his 44th Battalion in the front line, which it was already holding for the 10th Brigade, and moved the 42nd (Queensland) to the Black Line in support. The 10th Brigade marched to the back area where it was, fortunately, found that its loss did not approach that which had at first been feared.<sup>56</sup>

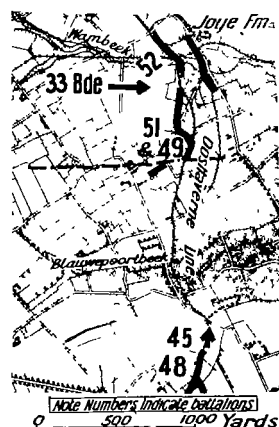
The threat of a German attack on the front of the 48th Battalion that afternoon had been so evident that, besides over twenty Lewis guns in the front line, and two Vickers machine-guns of the 12th Company,<sup>57</sup> every battery covering that front was ready when, about 5 o'clock, the enemy began to advance from Steignast Farm. Whether he was counter-attacking, or merely advancing to occupy a position which he believed to be empty or held by his own troops, is not clear. Whatever the attempt, it was easily defeated. On the right half of the II Anzac front the only Australian troops short of their objective now were Rockliff's company of the 44th, whom their own artillery still kept out of the Oostaverne Line.

But in the left sector of II Anzac the gap in the Blauwe-poortbeek valley still remained. On the southern edge of that depression the 48th Battalion (12th Brigade) was held up by Germans in a block-house of the Oostaverne Line, while the northern edge was barely topped by the right flank of the 13th Brigade. It will be remembered that the 52nd Battalion was to be relieved at dusk by the 33rd Brigade, and then brought round on the right of the 49th to close this gap. On the southern side of the gap Colonel Herring (45th),

<sup>56</sup> When asked on June 9 for carrying parties for the army corps, Lieut.-Colonel G. H. N. Jackson (G.S.O. 1, 3rd Division) replied: "Cannot ask 10th Brigade, reduced to 1,000 strong and now reorganising." Actually the brigade had lost few, if any, more men than the 9th. Its casualties were 1,363, and those of the 9th, when relieved four days later, were 1,666. From a tactical point of view, the wisdom of its withdrawal so far to the rear was questioned by General Godley; and, on the moral side, the 9th and 11th Brigades, which were thus left to bear alone the burden of three more days' fighting, felt the decision to be unfair. Careful investigation of the facts, however, shows that the 10th Brigade was, on June 8, undoubtedly the most worn and disorganised of the three. The shelling that afternoon had split many of its elements, and musters which indicated that its strength had fallen to a little over 1,000, were believed to indicate approximately its true condition.

<sup>57</sup> These were specially placed to cover the left flank of the brigade.

who controlled the 48th in that sector, was sending Captain Allen with a remnant of his own battalion to bomb northwards along the Oosttaverne Line and connect with the attacking 52nd.<sup>58</sup> At dusk the 9th Sherwood Foresters duly arrived to take over, together with the 6th Lincoln, the 52nd's line. But at 8.45 the Germans, observing this or some other movement, fired alarm signals, and their barrage came down along the left of the II Anzac front. The 25th Division, holding the Black Line on that flank for II Anzac, reported at 8.55 that the Germans were attacking, and, at 9 o'clock, that they had been seen to enter the front line. An S.O.S. signal was fired by some troops in rear of the 52nd. The British barrage descended, even the artillery of the 3rd Division being eventually drawn in, and for two hours the battlefield was deluged with terrific shell-fire.



This occurred at precisely the hour at which company commanders of the 52nd—in view of their intended attack later in the night—had been instructed to withdraw “whatever happens.” Some of them duly withdrew their men, through the barrage, the troops naturally running their hardest for shelter, and suffering losses although they ran. Some men were inevitably “rattled” by this process, and, although adjacent brigades had received early warning of the relief, the sight of the troops running gave rise to a score of alarmist reports that the 4th Division was retiring in confusion.<sup>59</sup> Captain Maxwell, on the other hand, having had experience of the nervy condition of some of the supporting troops, kept his section of the 52nd in the front line until the bombardment

<sup>58</sup> It was for this reason that Herring had ordered Lieutenant Stabback (48th) to withhold his attack (*see p. 652*).

<sup>59</sup> A British officer who, believing this, tried to stop the withdrawal was shot through the leg by some exasperated and reckless man of the 52nd. This crime, a grave one according to any law, military or civil, was apparently not officially reported by the officer, but word of it leaked out some time later. The officer happened to have been connected with the personal staff of the Commander-in-Chief, and considerable scandal was caused by the incident.

eased, and then personally warned all headquarters in the area close behind him before he brought his troops through. He withdrew later without difficulty.

Although this bombardment was reported—and believed—to cover a strong German counter-attack, the troops in the British front line knew that it did not. German accounts<sup>60</sup> show that the enemy infantry reported that *they* were being attacked, and that it was believed that the British had broken through in the Wambeek valley. The II Battalion of the 2nd Guard Reserve Regiment, and the II Battalion of the 51st I.R., were thereupon ordered to counter-attack, and it was reported that they had held up the British attack east of the Oostaverne Line, and established a line round the gap. Actually the British and Australians had seized the Oostaverne Line twenty-eight hours before, and were merely continuing to occupy it. It was the alarm on the German side that caused the bombardment.

The wild disturbance of the night put beyond question any possibility of attacking, as had been intended, down the Blauwepoortbeek. The 75th Brigade (25th Division), without the knowledge of the 4th Division, again shortened its barrage on to the Oostaverne Line, fortunately, however, shelling only the gap and the area in rear of it. In the general bombardment, Colonel Paul of the 49th was wounded.<sup>61</sup> Both he and Colonel Ridley (temporarily commanding the 52nd) had decided to use for their attack the companies of the 51st attached to their respective battalions. But these companies were much scattered in the bombardment. A jumping-off tape was duly laid by Captain Duchatel (13th Machine Gun Company), but, as only part of the 51st arrived, Captain Bardwell<sup>62</sup> of that battalion decided to postpone the operation. The tape was carefully rolled up again, and the 51st withdrew to its position guarding the valley.

South of the gap the 45th Battalion, now organised as one company, with Captain Allen as its front-line commander, carried out its attack by bombing along the trench. Lieutenants Muir, McIntyre,<sup>63</sup> and Young<sup>64</sup> led the assault, and

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<sup>60</sup> For example, the *History of the 5th Bavarian I.R.*, p. 85; *History of the 1st Guard Reserve F.A.R.*, p. 161.

<sup>61</sup> Major W. L. Arrell (South Brisbane) took his place. Captain C. Blakney (Hobart) of the 52nd also was hit during the relief.

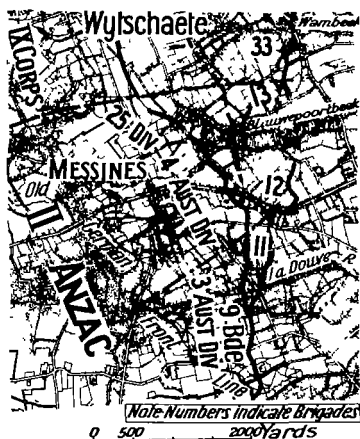
<sup>62</sup> Capt. Beresford E. Bardwell, 51st Bn Bush worker; of Geraldton and Broome. W. Aust.; b. Elsternwick, Vic, 21 Aug., 1890.

<sup>63</sup> Lieut. T. A. McIntyre, 45th Bn. Carpenter; of Berry, N.S.W.; b. Jasper's Brush, N.S.W., 1887. Killed in action, 10 June, 1917.

<sup>64</sup> Lieut. J. Young, M.C., D.C.M.; 45th Bn Coalminer; of West Wallsend, N.S.W.; b. Kilsyth, Scotland, 13 May, 1889. Died 14 Sept., 1937.

gained ground until they were held up by the enemy at a concrete blockhouse. They then barricaded the trench, and at Captain Allen's order McIntyre scouted across the Blauwepoortbeek valley west of the Oosttaverne Line and gained touch with the 51st.<sup>65</sup>

At 12 p.m., when the confusion of this second night had been cleared up, General Godley issued a more definite order that the barrage must not "under any circumstances whatever" be shortened without reference to corps headquarters; but he also cut at the root of the confusion by changing the system by which until now, while the 4th Australian Division held the front line, other divisions—the 25th and New Zealand—had occupied the two defensive lines close in rear of it. The divisional commanders—Holmes (4th Australian) and Russell (New Zealand)—recognised the impracticability of this system, and at 3 a.m. on the 9th Godley ordered that the New Zealand Division, whose loss had been much the heaviest,<sup>66</sup> should be withdrawn, and that the corps front should, from 9 that morning, be held by three divisions—the 3rd and 4th Australian, and the 25th—each controlling both its front and its hinterland. It mattered little that the troops could not be changed until the following night—the system was changed immediately, the 1st New Zealand Brigade coming for this day under control of the 4th Division, and the 13th Australian Brigade under the 25th Division. The 13th Brigade would be relieved by troops of the 25th Division that night (9th); but before coming out it was to make its twice-postponed attack on the gap by the Blauwepoortbeek, the 12th Brigade again bombing down to meet it.



<sup>65</sup> It was on this patrol that McIntyre found Captain W. L. Young's body (see p. 632).

<sup>66</sup> Amounting to nearly 5,000. The 3rd Division had then lost about 3,000, the 4th probably 2,000, the 25th about 3,000.



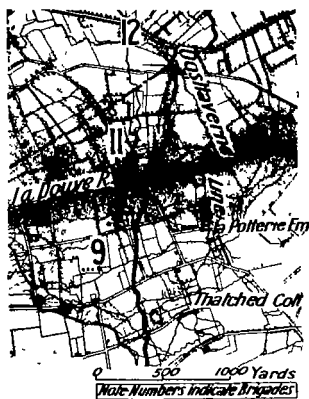
The Second Army had been in possession of Messines Ridge for two days. The anticipated counter-attacks had

**June 9—the  
right attempts  
to advance**

proved too feeble to arouse anxiety, and accordingly the "rounding off" of the position now began. As early as the evening of

June 7th General Monash had submitted to corps headquarters a plan for a formal advance at dusk on June 9th or 10th to the as yet unattacked portion of the Oosttaverne Line, south of the Douve.<sup>67</sup> General Godley, however, intended to launch a few days later a much more extensive advance south of the ground already won, with the object of endangering the whole remainder of the German position in the angle west of the River Lys, and forcing the enemy to withdraw from it. This operation would be carried out by the New Zealand Division, which was being strengthened by its new 4th Infantry Brigade. In preparation, the divisions holding the present battle-front were now ordered to endeavour to occupy, by sending out patrols, the Oosttaverne Line north and south of the Douve, including the Potterie Farm. The right flank would be thrown back to a rise on which lay a small building, "Thatched Cottage." The advance was to be made without artillery action. This order was issued by corps at 9.25 a.m. on June 9th and by the 3rd Division at 10. The 11th Brigade was to carry it out north of the Douve, the 9th Brigade south of it.

Since June 7th the 9th Brigade had suffered no counter-attack of any sort. Before dawn on the 9th some 20 Germans were seen approaching the right-flank crater, possibly to ascertain if it was occupied. Where the trenches were destroyed, these Germans had to move across the open and they were easily driven off with small-arms fire by the local garrison of the 33rd Battalion under Lieutenant Campbell.<sup>68</sup> In spite of harassing shell-fire



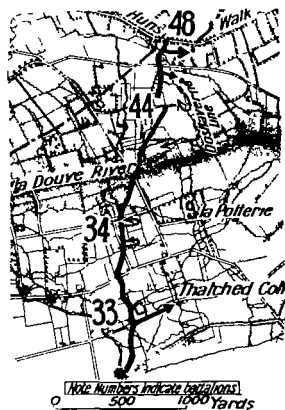
<sup>67</sup> General Monash stipulated that he should not attack with tired troops.

<sup>68</sup> Lieut. K. J. Campbell, M.C.; 33rd Bn. School teacher; of Alvie, Vic; b. Footscray, Vic., 27 June, 1887.

from the south-east, the 33rd and 34th were well dug in and well organised. The order to establish the posts reached them about noon, and at 1.40 the 33rd's patrol, 20 strong, under Lieutenant Thomas,<sup>69</sup> moved out to establish the post on the right flank at Thatched Cottage. Creeping in two parties up old trenches and drains, the patrol reached the cottage, bayonetting a sniper. The German intermediate trench-system which ran past the cottage was found empty, and a post was quickly established.

Both from this post, however, and from the lines of the 44th Battalion north of the Douve, Germans could be seen reinforcing the Oosttaerne Line from the Potterie northwards. North of the Douve, where that line was partly held by the 44th, the enemy was taking position east of it, behind the hedges and trees. This movement continued from 10 o'clock until shortly after 4,<sup>70</sup> when the Germans on both sides of the Douve were seen advancing, and others concentrating behind the Potterie. Apparently they were merely building up a line of posts, for no counter-attack followed. But the German front opposite the 34th and 44th had certainly been reinforced.

When at 4 o'clock the 34th Battalion began its patrol operation by sending forward a few scouts to draw fire, not a shot came from the Potterie system. But five minutes later when the two patrols, each 25 strong, left the trenches, a number of machine-guns immediately opened on them. The leader, Lieutenant Jeffries,<sup>71</sup> and several men were hit. The German line was obviously held in strength, and Corporal Jackson,<sup>72</sup> who then took



The advance made or attempted is shown by arrows.

<sup>69</sup> Lieut. E. C. P. Thomas, 33rd Bn. Jackeroo; of "Vermont," Amby, Q'land, b. Kensington, London, 18 Dec., 1896.

<sup>70</sup> It was separately reported by Captain C. L. Biles and Lieutenant W. J. Stables (Perth, W. Aust.) of the 44th.

<sup>71</sup> Capt. C. S. Jeffries, V.C.; 34th Bn. Mining surveyor; of Abermain, N.S.W.; b. Wallsend, N.S.W., 26 Oct., 1894. Killed in action, 12 Oct., 1917.

<sup>72</sup> Lieut. J. Jackson, 34th Bn. Miner; of Cessnock, N.S.W.; b. Q'land, 17 Dec., 1889.

charge, abandoned the attempt and brought in the wounded. North of the Douve the 44th, on discovering early in the day that the 48th was still ahead of it in the fragment of the support line at Huns' Walk, had swung up its left flank, its tired troops then digging a trench where the Oostaverne support line should have been—the third trench they had dug in two days. But south of this, both in the Oostaverne Line ("Undulating Trench") and in a sap west of it,<sup>73</sup> they were fired on by strong German posts.

Despite their many references to mythical attacks on the Potterie system, the available German narratives do not specifically mention this, the first actual attack on that system. Since the immediate counter-attack attempted on June 7 by parts of the I and II/9th Bavarian I.R. had failed, the Germans south of the Douve had been reinforced by the I and II/11th Bavarian I.R. (16th Bavarian Division) and parts of the 5th Bavarian R.I.R. On the night of June 8 the 11th Bavarian I.R. had begun to relieve the 9th, and it was probably part of the 11th that was seen moving in the Potterie system.

North of the Douve the dispositions of the 1st Guard Reserve Division had been changed, and it was now holding its front with three regiments, (from north to south) 1st Guard Reserve Regiment, 2nd Guard Reserve Regiment, and 64th R.I.R. It was against the 64th R.I.R. that the patrols of the 44th Battalion came.

While the patrols of the 44th were operating, a separate party under Lieutenant McKeon<sup>74</sup> of the 47th was sent out by Colonel Imlay (47th) to ransack "Hun House," which, on a captured German map, was marked as a battalion headquarters. This patrol ran into some Germans who were barricading the trench near by. The Germans fired their signal for artillery protection, and the barrages of both sides came down.<sup>75</sup> It was in this bombardment that Rockliff's company of the 44th suffered its principal loss.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> "Ungodly Avenue"

<sup>74</sup> Lieut. F. J. McKeon, 47th Bn. Clerk; of Longreach, Q'land; b. Barcaldine, Q'land, 31 Oct., 1890

<sup>75</sup> Besides three men of the 47th, this patrol (according to a record of the 48th) included Sergeant M. P. O'Brien and several "choice spirits" of the 48th. Their task took them out across the front of the 44th. On tumbling upon the Germans, they emptied their revolvers at them, but the enemy replied with bombs, and the patrol had to lie in shell-holes for three hours. It returned safely after dark through the lines of the 44th, bringing a bag of documents taken from a dead officer of the XIX German Corps.

<sup>76</sup> Captain W. T. Bryan (Perth, W. Aust.) and Lieutenant G. H. Hughes (Boulder and Kalgoorlie, W. Aust.) were killed. Lieutenant E. Hocking (Boulder, W. Aust.) was killed by a sniper the same day. Lieutenant R. E. Walsh (Newstead, Tas.) had been sniped on June 8.

Thus only one post of the 3rd Division—at Thatched Cottage—was established before dark on June 9th. But after dark the 36th Battalion relieved the 34th south of the Douve and established two posts half-way to the Oosttaerne Line,<sup>77</sup> and the 33rd placed an additional post further south.<sup>78</sup> North of Huns' Walk the 48th Battalion had strengthened the advanced line during the day by digging posts across the open<sup>79</sup> (as shown in the marginal sketch), under cover of fire from two trench-mortars brought up by Lieutenant Coward.<sup>80</sup> An air-patrol reported that no Germans could be seen about the farms east of the Oosttaerne Line, and the 4th Division was therefore ordered to patrol to Gapaard Farm, Les Quatre Rois Cabaret, and Steignast Farm. The country beyond the Oosttaerne Line, however, proved to be well held by German posts, and the patrols of the 47th returned after the loss of half their men.<sup>81</sup>



<sup>77</sup> At points where two communication trenches crossed the Messines-La Basse Ville road.

<sup>78</sup> Under Sergeant C. S. Crowley (Barraba district, N.S.W.; later lieutenant; died of wounds on 25 June, 1918). An anti-tank field-gun was found in a neighbouring ditch.

<sup>79</sup> The maintenance of advanced posts by the 48th in the open near the position of the supposed support line was one of the most striking achievements of the operations on the Oosttaerne Line. On the 8th during daylight a patrol under Sergeant H. C. Whittle (Pinnaroo, S. Aust.) was sent to select positions for these posts. Whittle made three journeys, under fire, each time taking out and placing a post, whose men took food with them. Sergeants Whittle and P. Symes (Perth, W. Aust.) afterwards went out to visit these posts and ensure that they were digging, and on these journeys took water to them, as did Lance-Corporal J. G. Hogan (Adelaide). Whittle did not attempt to creep, but walked straight out, after the fashion of the men of Anzac, taking his chance of the bullets, and looking calmly around. While he and Symes were out they heard a call, and found a man who had been wounded in the first attack on the Oosttaerne Line. They returned for a stretcher, and went out and brought him in. Sergeant J. G. Polkinghorne (Silverton, N.S.W.) also patrolled the advanced line, and Lance-Corporal D. H. Fisher (Unley, S. Aust.) drove back with rifle-grenades a neighbouring German post.

<sup>80</sup> Lieut. H. K. Coward, M.C., D.C.M.; 12th Light Trench Mortar Battery. Grazier; of Mungindi, N.S.W.; b. Sydney, 20 Nov., 1887.

<sup>81</sup> That of the 45th, under Lieutenant Muir, tried to reach Gapaard, but found German posts intervening.

Farther north the attack by the 13th Brigade down the Blauwepoortbeek took place at 10 p.m. General Glasgow had decided to employ for it his reserve battalion, the 50th (South Australia).<sup>82</sup> A jumping-off tape was to be laid on the same line as previously, but the officer charged with this duty lost his way. The troops, however, lined up, and at 10 o'clock the attack was launched. In this sector also the German line had been reported by an airman as appearing to be empty, and just before the attack there was received a report that a British artillery officer had walked round the Oosttaverne trench on the whole front of the division and met no enemy. Lieutenant-Colonel Salisbury of the 50th was also informed that the 12th Brigade had this day bombed from the south almost to the bottom of the valley, reducing the gap from 650 to 450 yards.

All this information was misleading. The 45th Battalion had indeed that afternoon made another bombing attack. Taking advantage of the fact that the Germans in the block-houses remained quiet—and probably slept—by day, the attacking party approached the first blockhouse and put in a barricade. But they had barely begun it when the Germans, tumbling out of their shelters, came at them, bombing furiously. The nearest part of the 48th, under Lieutenant Rafferty,<sup>83</sup> joined Captain Allen in keeping up a constant supply of grenades to the fighters. The main difficulty was to avoid the fire of machine-guns not only in the blockhouse ahead, but in other positions close by and also among the trees to the east. These guns supported the German post and prevented any attempt to surround it. Lieutenant Barton,<sup>84</sup> taking forward more bombers, was killed by this fire. The enemy failed to seize the barricade, but the Australian advance had been only slight.

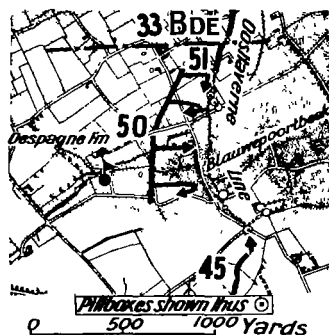
<sup>82</sup> The 50th had, however, already been constantly engaged in carrying supplies for the rest of the brigade. In the afternoon attack on June 7 one carrying party of the 50th under Lieutenant J. O'Donohue actually reached the Oosttaverne Line before the attacking troops, dumped its loads there, and on its way back met the attack coming forward. It had 200 men carrying that day, and two officers, Lieutenants C. G. Edwards (South Geelong, Vic.) and M. M. McGregor (Ballarat, Vic.), were wounded in this service. (McGregor was again wounded on 25 Apr., 1918, and died on May 3.)

<sup>83</sup> Lieut. R. S. Rafferty, M.M.; 48th Bn. Cartage contractor; of Victoria Park and Bencubbin, W. Aust.; b. Paisley, Scotland, 17 Sept., 1895.

<sup>84</sup> Lieut. R. A. Barton, 45th Bn. University student; of Sydney; b. Gladesville, N.S.W., 26 May, 1895. Killed in action, 9 June, 1917.

The night attack by the 50th was to be made without an artillery barrage and in strict silence, no shot being fired except by order of an officer. The battalion's waves were, however, detected as soon as they started. Flares rose from the German blockhouses in the valley. The enemy's barrage came down behind the South Australians, setting fire to an old German ammunition-store and so lighting up the ground. Machine-guns opened from the blockhouses<sup>85</sup> on both flanks of the gap, and from Deconinck and Delporte Farms farther down the valley. The 50th reached the wire, but found it to a large extent unbroken. Some men dropped into shell-holes, others fled back to their starting point. On the extreme left of the attack part of Captain Churchill Smith's company made its way through an opening in the entanglement and, reaching the trench close to where it was already held by their own side, extended southwards along it until stopped by fire from the nearest blockhouse on that side of the valley.<sup>86</sup> A few South Australians also held on at a small concrete shelter just short of the wire, but, on being seen by the Germans in the morning, they were shot out of it with the loss of half their number. From the south Captain Allen and Lieutenant McIntyre with the remaining fragment of the 45th, desperately weary, made another bombing attack after the nearest blockhouse had been bombarded by a Stokes mortar of the 12th Brigade. Again three German machine-guns, firing from positions away from the blockhouse, stopped the attack before it had gone a dozen yards.

The 13th Brigade was to have been relieved before dawn on June 10th by the 25th Division. But daylight arrived before the situation could be ascertained. Relief was then impossible; moreover Generals Holmes and Glasgow were not content



<sup>85</sup> See Vol. XII, plate 342

<sup>86</sup> With this party was Lieutenant E. H. Price (of Mitcham, S. Aust.), who had received in his cheek two pieces of German shell. In spite of this painful wound, he carried on in the trench until Churchill Smith insisted on his going to the rear.

to hand over to the relieving brigade the task which for three nights had remained unfinished. Holmes himself at dawn went up with General Robertson (12th Brigade), the brigade-major (Major Lee), Captain Allen, and a major of artillery to the 45th's barricade, and through a periscope viewed the nearest German blockhouse forty yards away. He decided to have the Blauwepoortbeek valley and its farms and defences, including the blockhouse, bombarded during the day, and to renew the attack immediately after dark. The 52nd Battalion, which was this day rested in the old British front line west of Messines, would help the 50th in a final attempt. The 45th would again endeavour to bomb down to meet them. It was to be relieved afterwards by the 48th, which also was resting;<sup>87</sup> and, if the 50th and 52nd finished their task, they too might be relieved before dawn by the 25th Division, but only if this could be done without hurry.

The hour fixed for this attack, 10 o'clock, was earlier than Colonel Salisbury of the 50th desired, for it meant that the tape must be laid, and the 52nd approach over Messines Ridge, while there was still light enough for the Germans to see these proceedings. As Salisbury feared, Lieutenant Rogers<sup>88</sup> of the 50th, while trying to lay the tape, was wounded, and the 52nd was seen on the ridge and very heavily shelled, Captain Stubbings being wounded.<sup>89</sup> The control thus devolved on Captain Maxwell. The huge Tasmanian, six-feet five in his socks, himself crawled out and laid the tape. Three hundred yards away the Germans in the blockhouses were firing flares, and thrice a machine-gun shot at him; but he duly laid the tape for the 52nd, and about half the battalion reached it. The other half, by a mistake of the guides sent by the 50th, was led on to an old tape farther back, originally laid down to guide tanks. On the left, on the 50th's front, the tape had not been laid, but that battalion knew the ground and lined out punctually.

The artillery had during the day accurately bombarded the German trench and Delporte and Deconinck Farms, and had put some shells into the German wire; and, when at 10 o'clock

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<sup>87</sup> It had been relieved on the previous night by the 46th.

<sup>88</sup> Lieut. J. H. Rogers, 50th Bn. Insurance clerk; of Adelaide; b. Adelaide, 17 Sept., 1894.

<sup>89</sup> Lieutenant H. K. Mendoza (Brisbane), its adjutant, was killed next day, while the battalion was on its way to rest.

the covering barrage fell, the advancing 50th found the wire somewhat better cut than on the night before. The Germans bombed the troops as they approached, but on the left Churchill Smith's company, already ensconced in the Oostaverne Line, suppressed with bombs and Lewis guns the opposing machine-gun post on that flank.<sup>90</sup> Owing to the barrage the enemy fire was less than before, but Lieutenant O'Donohue<sup>91</sup> was killed, Captain Wilton<sup>92</sup> lost an eye, Captain Seager was hit in the face by a piece of bomb, and Lieutenants Noblett,<sup>93</sup> Keats,<sup>94</sup> and Rogers also were wounded. Nevertheless rifle-grenadiers kept down the enemy while their mates worked through the wire, and as these approached the Germans threw down their rifles and fled.<sup>95</sup>



The 50th thus seized most of their objective, but the two nearest companies of the 52nd were only forming on the tape when the assault began. Before they were clear of the jumping-off line, the German barrage was down on them. On their front the wire was practically uncut, and the Germans were bombing it. Lieutenant Pearce<sup>96</sup> was killed and, except for a few men who penetrated on the flank of the 50th, the 52nd's direct attack failed. Some of the men, however, were reorganised and, with one of the companies that had been wrongly guided, they were passed into the Oostaverne Line through the portion captured by the 50th. Thence they worked southward into the valley; at about 1 o'clock a message arrived from them saying that they must be very close to the

<sup>90</sup> These Germans, in one of four artillery emplacements just beyond the first Oostaverne trench, had turned a machine-gun on the previous night's attack. During the 10th they tried to send a man to the rear, but the 50th shot him. A German then tried to send a signal message with flags, but half-a-dozen shots at once stopped him. That night, when the 50th bombed this shelter, the grenades bounced harmlessly from the concrete, but they kept its garrison quiet.

<sup>91</sup> Lieut. J. O'Donohue, 50th Bn. Tea blender; of Norwood, S. Aust.; b. Kapunda, S. Aust., 4 March, 1887. Killed in action, 10 June, 1917.

<sup>92</sup> Capt. R. G. Wilton, 50th Bn. Civil engineer; of Adelaide; b. Adelaide, 30 Oct., 1892.

<sup>93</sup> Lieut. E. R. Noblett, M.C.; 50th Bn. Salesman; of Port Pirie, S. Aust.; b. Belalie East, S. Aust., 25 Jan., 1895.

<sup>94</sup> Lieut. W. V. Keats, 52nd Bn. Bank clerk; of Hobart, Tas.; b. McRobies Gully, Hobart, 12 Jan., 1890. Died of wounds, 10 June, 1917.

<sup>95</sup> Seventy-five rifles were found there; to save ammunition, some were used by the South Australians in sniping.

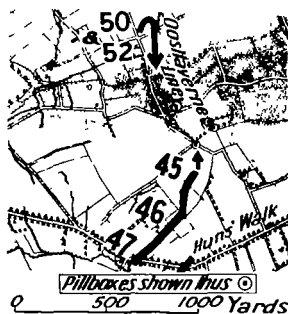
<sup>96</sup> Lieut. C. B. Pearce, 52nd Bn. Pastoralist; of Hobart, Tas., and Pingelly, W. Aust.; b. Hobart, 24 Feb., 1888. Killed in action, 10 June, 1917.



45th Battalion. But they were stopped by fire from the blockhouses in the farm ruins on the southern slope.

The 45th had again, as ordered, launched a bomb attack, but its officers on the spot knew that the effort was hopeless.

The artillery had fired, but had not hit the impeding blockhouse.<sup>97</sup> Even on the previous night the men had been so tired that they fell asleep as they dug their trench; a man would put in his shovel, fall asleep, and have to be shaken before he could drag it out.<sup>98</sup> Captain Allen himself would not have ordered the assault. But when Colonel Herring during the afternoon telephoned to Lieutenant McIntyre, who had



already led three attempts, and told him that the strong-point must be taken, McIntyre, knowing this was his death-warrant, answered simply: "All right, Sir; if it is to be taken, it will be taken." At 10 o'clock he and his men went straight for it, "over the top." The surrounding machine-guns opened as usual. Five yards from the blockhouse McIntyre and Sergeant Stevenson<sup>99</sup> were killed, and the attack failed. The 48th immediately afterwards took over the trenches. The 45th had kept its spirit to the last. It had entered the battle in greater strength than any other Australian battalion and came out the weakest, having lost 16 officers and 552 men.

On the same night the new thrust on the right flank—against the Oosttaverne Line across and south of the Douve —was continued, this time with artillery assistance. South of the Douve the line of posts established the night before provided a jumping-off line half-way to the objective. The objective was bombarded from 5 to 6 p.m. by heavy artillery, but, possibly through overwear of the guns, their shooting was extraordinarily erratic.

<sup>97</sup> This blockhouse is shown in *Vol. XII, plate 341*.

<sup>98</sup> The 45th having then only three company officers in the line, the adjutant, Lieutenant A. L. Varley (Inverell, N.S.W.), had gone up there and assisted consolidation. In 1940, as Lieut.-Col., he commands 2nd/18th Bn., A.I.F.

<sup>99</sup> Sgt. A. L. G. Stevenson (No. 3479, 45th Bn.). Engineer; of Penrith, N.S.W.; b Redfern, N.S.W., 1894. Killed in action, 10 June, 1917.

North of the Douve shells from some of the "heavies" fell among the troops holding the captured part of the Oostaverne Line; south of it they fell on the posts 250 yards short of that line, and even on the Black Line, 500 yards behind the front. In the northern post of the 36th they shattered a Lewis gun team.

The natural dismay thus caused had passed before dusk, but at nightfall a new bombardment, this time from the German artillery, descended heavily on the 3rd Division's front. It was probably caused by the 4th Division's attack, whose starting time—10 p.m.—had not been co-ordinated by corps headquarters with that for the 3rd Division, 11 p.m.<sup>100</sup> The bombardment caught the 43rd Battalion, which was coming up to relieve the 44th and to carry out with two companies the attack north of the Douve. South of the Douve it also caught the 200 men of the 36th, whom Lieutenant-Colonel Milne<sup>101</sup> was sending forward for the operation on his front. It also fell on the left party of the 33rd. The 43rd got into position, though with loss. In the 36th Major Wells,<sup>102</sup> who had just deployed his force, was wounded. Many of his troops were killed, wounded, or scattered. But remnants were re-formed by Lieutenants Ewing,<sup>103</sup> Herps,<sup>104</sup> and Lowden,<sup>105</sup> and when the five minutes' covering barrage fell, the attack duly went forward.

The right party of the 33rd under Lieutenant Thomas, after shooting a few of the enemy, established its post at 11.10 at "Fuze Cottage" in the Oostaverne Line, 600 yards ahead. The party next to it, under Lieutenant Clarence,<sup>106</sup> after having an N.C.O. killed in the bombardment, advanced, but not swiftly enough to keep pace with the barrage. On

<sup>100</sup> General Monash had thought that the 4th Division was attacking at 9 o'clock, and that the disturbance would have subsided before the 3rd Division attacked.

<sup>101</sup> One of the fighting leaders of the 9th Battalion at the Landing, now commanding the 36th.

<sup>102</sup> Major W. Wells, M.C.; 36th Bn. Member of Aust. Permanent Forces; of Sydney; b. Home Rule, N.S.W., 17 April, 1884. (On Major Wells being wounded, Captain C. J. Doig, North Sydney, took charge. Doig was killed at Bony on 1 Oct., 1918.)

<sup>103</sup> Lieut. W. T. Ewing, M.C.; 33rd Bn. Station overseer; of Glen Innes, N.S.W.; b. Glen Innes, 23 Feb., 1893.

<sup>104</sup> Lieut. C. H. S. Herps, 36th Bn. Company manager; of Hawkesbury River district, N.S.W.; b. Leet's Vale, N.S.W., Oct., 1877. Died of wounds, 17 Sept., 1917.

<sup>105</sup> Lieut. C. L. C. Lowden, 36th Bn. Clerk; of Hornsby, N.S.W.; b. Harden, N.S.W., 9 March, 1897. Died of wounds, 19 July, 1917.

<sup>106</sup> Lieut. E. A. Clarence, 33rd Bn. Bank accountant; of Clarence River district, N.S.W.; b. Gunning, N.S.W., 25 Feb., 1889.

its reaching the Oosttaverne Line, a machine-gun opened fire from a dugout twenty yards along the trench. The bombers immediately attacked, and the Germans abandoned their gun and fled into the Douve valley. The 36th, advancing behind a perfect barrage, met feeble resistance near the Douve, and slightly more at La Potterie.<sup>107</sup> North of the Douve Lieutenant Wald's<sup>108</sup> company of the 43rd rushed and bayoneted some machine-gunners who opened fire on the right, and seized the gun. Lieutenant Daley's<sup>109</sup> company met little or no opposition. The Oosttaverne Line was occupied and, on the left, posts were established beyond it. Thus by midnight on June 10th the Oosttaverne Line had been taken as far south as Potterie Farm.<sup>110</sup>



Position at midnight, June 10/11.

The history of the 64th R.I.R., which faced the 43rd Battalion, states that the assembly of troops on its front had been detected, and that, as soon as these troops began to move, the artillery barrage came down heavily and promptly. It is wrongly claimed that the attack was beaten off, and that any Australians who entered the German trench were killed or captured.<sup>111</sup>

<sup>107</sup> Where Lieutenant Ewing advanced, the Germans were holding shell-holes and opened fire when the Australians were thirty yards away. The 36th at once charged; about ten Germans were killed, but a larger number retreated and took position again some distance ahead. They were driven further by Lewis gun fire. Two of their machine-guns were captured.

<sup>108</sup> Lieut. P. B. Wald, M.C.; 43rd Bn. Bank accountant; of Rose Park, S. Aust.; b. Adelaide, 16 Nov., 1887.

<sup>109</sup> Capt. J. J. Daley, M.C.; 43rd Bn. Grocer; of Marion, S. Aust.; b. Carlton, Vic., 22 Dec., 1889.

<sup>110</sup> The somewhat dangerously advanced southern post at Fuze Cottage had afterwards to be withdrawn. In going forward the 33rd's party had passed an enemy outpost, of whose precise position the party was unaware, although it was known that some of the enemy had been in the neighbourhood. The runners who were sent back with word that the Australian post had been established came upon these Germans, and had to lie low, and the message thus failed to get through. Captain C. H. Linklater (Wollstonecraft, N.S.W.), who was waiting for news before sending up a party of the 35th to take over the post, then went forward himself with a runner. He walked into the Germans and, fighting them with his revolver, was mortally wounded and made prisoner. Shortly before day-break a messenger arrived from Lieutenant Thomas asking if the post was to hold on or withdraw. As it was then too late for its relief by the 35th, and the post had no food, Lieutenant A. H. Fletcher (Armidale, N.S.W.), now in command of the company, fired a pre-arranged signal for withdrawal. The post came in at 3.15. Linklater died in a German hospital, the enemy who captured him having evidently managed to get clear before daylight.

<sup>111</sup> *History of 64th R.I.R.*, p. 114. The time of this attack is given as "about 10 p.m.," and it is possible that the fighting thus attributed to the 64th R.I.R. is that which really occurred at that hour in the Blauwepoortbeek valley. In that case either the 64th was not where it is generally supposed to have been, or its historian has misread the report of a sister regiment's action.

The Germans captured in this attack<sup>112</sup> were, as usual, sent back to divisional headquarters, and when being examined, at 8 a.m., they made the surprising statement that by this time along the whole front their troops would have retired. The garrison, they said, had been ordered to withdraw to the Warneton Line, three-quarters of a mile in rear, and was to be in occupation of it by 1.30 that morning. They themselves had seen the order, but, before it was carried out by their posts, the British bombardment had fallen, causing confusion, and in this state the attack had caught them. Their statement was immediately forwarded to corps headquarters, and to the forward-line troops.

Meanwhile the 4th Division also had received a striking report sent at 4.53 from Colonel Salisbury's headquarters near the Blauwepoortbeek. It said that Captain Seager of the 50th had sent word that the Germans could be seen leaving their support position. A machine-gun was still firing from a concrete blockhouse on the left, but the 50th was attacking it. Lewis gunners were firing on the retreating enemy, and the 52nd was sending a patrol down the stream. At 5.30 a German aeroplane flew over that sector dropping white and red lights, and the Germans came forward a little, having perhaps withdrawn too far. But the trench and blockhouses by the Blauwepoortbeek were found empty. Captain Mayersbeth of the 48th, who had relieved the 45th south of the gap, remarked a strange inactivity beyond the barricade, and, himself walking down the trench, found the first blockhouse empty except for two dead Germans and an abandoned field-gun. The 52nd, whom he met lower down, told him that the Germans had gone. Patrols of both brigades searched the fortified farm that had caused so much trouble in the Blauwepoortbeek, and found there another German field-piece. The enemy had taken the breech-blocks from both guns.

The decision of Crown Prince Rupprecht to withdraw had been arrived at on June 10. The existing Warneton Line was not suitable for continued occupation, but the troops were to retire to the general line Klein Zillebeke—Houthem—Bas Warneton—Deulemont, and hold on there while a new permanent line, west of the Flandern Stellung, was constructed. All German accounts say that the withdrawal was carried out during the night of June 10 without disturbance. Officers' patrols were left behind to deceive the British.

<sup>112</sup> A few men of the 11th Bav. I.R. (with two runners of the 9th Bav. I.R.) and a few of the 1/1st Guard Reserve Regiment.

With this withdrawal the Battle of Messines practically ended. Corps headquarters at once ordered up its mounted troops, but infantry patrols meanwhile had been probing out to the front. Before the 13th Brigade was relieved by the 4th on the night of June 11th, the 52nd Battalion had stationed a post at Deconinck Farm.<sup>113</sup> The 11th British Division (IX Corps), which now took over the line north of the Blauwepoortbeek, was assisted by a patrol under Lieutenant Noblett (50th Battalion) to occupy Delporte Farm. Farther south Captain Reginald Jones<sup>114</sup> of the 14th established posts beyond Gapaard Farm.<sup>115</sup> At Huns' Walk the Germans held up a little longer the patrols of the 15th,<sup>116</sup> but by June 12th the 4th Brigade had advanced the outpost-line through the fields and hedges south of Gapaard. Seven hundred yards beyond could be seen the wire of the Warneton Line.<sup>117</sup>



Line of posts, June 12.

The 4th Brigade, which had taken over the whole front of the 4th Division as well as that of the 3rd Division north of the Douve,<sup>118</sup> was itself

<sup>113</sup> Captain Maxwell himself guided the relieving troops (14th Bn.) to a block-house beyond Deconinck on the Gapaard road. It was the last battle achievement of this fine officer. The strain to which he had subjected himself, since the days when, as a trooper of the 3rd Light Horse Regiment, he twice fainted at his sniping "poszy" at Quinn's in Gallipoli (see Vol. XII, plate 93), became too great. When, on August 18, a friend, Captain B. H. Arnott (Strathfield, N.S.W.), whom he was to rejoin in half-an-hour in the front line, was killed by a shell while taking a different track to the front, Maxwell collapsed. Later General Glasgow, then commanding the 1st Division, chose him for his aide-de-camp.

<sup>114</sup> Capt. R. W. Jones, M.C., M.M.; 14th Bn. Electrician; of Essendon, Vic.; b. St. Kilda, Vic., 1 Dec., 1891.

<sup>115</sup> Six abandoned field-guns were found in this sector.

<sup>116</sup> The 15th dug a new trench for 300 yards south of Huns' Walk, beyond Hun House.

<sup>117</sup> These posts were placed entirely by the infantry. The corps cavalry regiment and cyclists were hurried forward on June 11, but, through no fault of their own members, they were rather the plaything of corps headquarters than a useful instrument for the operation. Unlike the infantry, who knew the country and the work, they had but vague information and orders. They worked dismounted, a party of cyclists holding the re-established post beyond Thatched Cottage, and some of the Otago Mounted Rifles a post further north. The remainder appear to have reached the front line, but to have taken no part in the active patrolling.

<sup>118</sup> At 10 o'clock on the night of June 11, while the relief of the 11th Brigade by the 4th was in process, the German artillery, as before, laid down a barrage, causing loss. Lieutenant W. S. Fitzpatrick (Sydney), 13th Battalion, was killed

relieved by a brigade of the 25th British Division on the night of June 12th. The southern brigade of the 3rd Division, the 9th, exhausted by constant digging as well as fighting, was on June 12th assisted by burial parties and carriers from the 2nd New Zealand Infantry Brigade. The two British battalions<sup>119</sup> that had held the quiet front south of the offensive as far as the Lys were also relieved by the new 4th New Zealand Infantry Brigade.

It was intended that the New Zealanders should attack that front in three days' time, but at 9 a.m. on the 12th New Zealanders were seen wandering over the German trenches south of the 9th Brigade's flank. They proved to be one of the burial parties sent out by the 9th Brigade. After burying the dead in the old No-Man's Land, where not a shot was fired at them, they had gone on, without knowing it, into the German lines. The trenches were empty, and patrols afterwards sent out by the 4th New Zealand Brigade discovered that, except for covering parties, the enemy had withdrawn from his whole front between there and the Lys.

The withdrawal on this front had really been carried out thirty-six hours before, on the same night as on the main battle-front. During June 11 the area had been held only by officers' patrols. That night the 4th Bavarian Division, holding this sector, was relieved by the 22nd Reserve.

The New Zealand Division relieved the 3rd Australian on the night of June 12th, and, after several days of difficult patrol-fighting ending with a formal attack, routed the German posts from most of the area in front of the Warneton Line.

Such is the story of the Battle of Messines, so far as the Australians took part in it. From both the German and the British point of view, it was only a preliminary operation, a clearing of the flank for the great thrust that was to be made presently from Ypres. Already on June 10th the headquarters of the Fifth British Army, which was to make that thrust, had opened at La Lovie in Flanders.<sup>120</sup> Already the XIV Corps, the unused reserve for Messines, was on its way to Ypres with two of its divisions. Already—though it would have greatly disturbed Sir Douglas Haig to know it—the commander of the German armies opposing him recognised the British intentions.

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<sup>119</sup> Of the 57th Division, lent to the 3rd Australian Division.

<sup>120</sup> General Gough had actually moved thither on May 31.

The object next before us (noted Crown Prince Rupprecht in his diary on June 12) is to win the battle now beginning to develop at Ypres. That the English are striving for a decision here is certain.

Nevertheless Messines meant far more to both sides than a mere subsidiary fight. Although even the frankest of German historians<sup>121</sup> does not face—or perhaps does not know—the full truth of this defeat, the German official history says that the British stroke “fully succeeded,” that the Messines salient “had been lost with dreadful casualties,” and that “French confidence began to grow again.” General von Kuhl describes the battle as “one of the worst tragedies in the world war.”<sup>122</sup> For the British the result was a revelation—how welcome, only those know who can fully recall their own feelings at the time—that the British staff could plan and carry through a first-rate stroke with brilliant success. To the Australians who took part, the British higher leadership in this fight was as heartening as that in the Bullecourt operations had been depressing. It is true that Haig’s intention to capture the bulk of the German guns in the afternoon attack was not fulfilled, most of the guns lying behind the Oosttaverne Line.<sup>123</sup> Moreover, especially in the later phases, mistakes were made, partly due to the inexperience even of the Second Army staff in such offensives. No small part of the careful work of the 3rd Australian Division—for example, except on the extreme right, the digging of communication trenches across and beyond the old No-Man’s Land—was labour wasted. During the disturbance of battle communication trenches so far back were unnecessary, and the employment of troops upon them merely increased the numbers exposed to the German artillery on the southern flank.<sup>124</sup>

<sup>121</sup> For example, the compiler of the official history *Schlachten des Weltkrieges*, Vol. 27, *Flandern 1917*. His account, though confined to two pages, is obviously an honest attempt to face the facts of this episode, but it contains important errors as to the mining, the counter-attack of June 7, and the supposed retention by the Germans of the Oosttaverne Line until June 10. Although the truth as to the British attack is now well known, German unit histories consist largely of stories of the beating back of attempts that were never made.

<sup>122</sup> *Der Weltkrieg 1914-1918*, Vol. II, p. 114. The historian of the 18th Bav I.R. says that the battle was one of the most dreadful and depressing experiences of the regiment in the war.

<sup>123</sup> Their position is noted by Crown Prince Rupprecht, Vol. II, p. 188.

<sup>124</sup> The chief engineer of the division, Lieut.-Colonel H. O. Clogstoun (of Anzac fame), whose report emphasised this point, also stated that the connecting up of the Australian trench-tramways with the old German ones was unprofitable, at least in battle-time. Another defect in the arrangements was the reliance by the Second Army upon a pipe-system for water-supply up to the old British front. The pipes were too often broken by shelling. It is interesting to note that water was partly obtained by boring in rear of Hill 63. Such work along the whole British front

But the impressive success of the British mining operations, the clearness of the plans, the overwhelming bombardment, the counter-battery fire which during the first stage stamped out most of the enemy's artillery,<sup>125</sup> the effective observation maintained by the British air force,<sup>126</sup> the transport of material and food by improvised pack-trains—which, at least in the 47th Battalion, came by June 9th right up to the front line, delivering a hot meal to the tired troops there<sup>127</sup>—the swift and comparatively smooth evacuation of the wounded,<sup>128</sup> gave Australians a confidence in the

was carried out at this time by the Australian Electrical Mining and Mechanical Boring Company (the old headquarters section of the Mining Battalion) stationed at Hazebrück. On June 19, when the Red Lodge Bore became choked, for example, the Director of Mines sent Major Edgeworth David (then Geologist on his staff) and Captain S. B. Hunter (Moorooduc, Vic.) to report, and then arranged for Major R. V. Morse (Rockdale and Mosman, N.S.W.; died 26 Jan., 1925), commanding the A.E.M.M.B. Coy., to have the bore repaired. An inspecting officer from G.H.Q., Major R. S. G. Stokes, R.E., noted in his diary that the commander of a British tunnelling company (Major Wraith) had "nothing but praise for Morse and his men, whose efficiency and 'devotion to duty' are a matter for his enthusiastic commendation. If a pump goes wrong, it is out of the mine, back to the shops in Hazebrück, and again underground in 24 hours. The Australians do not work by hours, but by contract—to keep the water down."

<sup>125</sup> The German batteries beyond the southern flank, however, were not destroyed, and, as in the fighting at Arras, the British counter-battery work was chiefly effective during the first attack. After enemy batteries took up new positions, the British could not suppress them, probably because they could not so easily find them. The German counter-battery fire was weak, but a large dump on Hill 63 was exploded on June 7, and fires caused in several batteries, including the 37th Australian. On June 14, through the blowing up of a dump near Wulverghem, 16 men of the 110th Howitzer Battery were killed and 9 wounded. Corporal J. C. Browne (West Tamworth, W. Aust.) and Gunner A. E. Maher (Grenfell, N.S.W.) gallantly rescued some of the wounded from within a few yards of the blazing ammunition.

<sup>126</sup> Since the end of April the British airmen in the Second Army, as elsewhere, had regained the upper hand. On May 8 Lieutenant C. H. Alexander (Armistead and Neutral Bay, N.S.W.; killed at Messines on June 8), of the 9th Light Trench Mortar Battery, wrote: "When last I commented on our position in the air I was not able to say anything very complimentary, but the outlook is now very different. We seldom get a sight of a Hun machine nowadays, and the sky as far as we can see is constantly patrolled by our fliers. . . . Our fellows counted as many as five such victories (in the air) here one morning."

<sup>127</sup> R.Q.M.S. S. F. O'Toole (Brisbane) brought the pack animals up there. In a description of this night of terrible bombardment, Private Gallwey says that two petrol tins of steaming hot tea reached his party in Oxygen Trench. "We hardly knew whether we were drinking hot tea or hot petrol. . . . Nevertheless, being hot, it was very refreshing." On previous nights the pack-train came as far as battalion headquarters near Messines. The pack-train was formed by withdrawing drivers, animals, and equipment from battalions, field companies, and signal companies. That of the 4th Division was manned by some 195 drivers and others. The list of those mentioned for outstanding work is headed by Private W. Berry (Young, N.S.W.; died 31 July, 1929), 14th Battalion. In the 3rd Division the pack-train consisted of four troops (one for each brigade and one for divisional purposes), each consisting of 4 officers and 100 others with 164 horses, 96 pack saddles, and 48 saddle attachments. The loads varied from 100 to 200 lb. During the wild night of June 8 Captain R. W. Dewson (Hobart; killed in action on 27 May, 1918) took 90 mule-loads of ammunition to Schnitzel Farm. Sergeant W. Appleby (Wagga Wagga, N.S.W.; died 29 Jan., 1938) took forward 52 mule-loads from Ploegsteert Wood. From Schnitzel Farm the loads were taken forward by hand. In the 4th Division the work of carrying parties of the 46th Battalion under Lieutenant R. I. Brittain (Nirrandra, Vic.), and in the 3rd Division that of Sergeant P. C. Statton (Tyenna, Tas.) of the 40th, evoked special admiration.

<sup>128</sup> Owing to Hill 63 standing in the middle of its front, the II Anzac Corps had two lines of clearance, a northern to Baillieu, and a southern largely to Trois Arbres. The twelve field ambulances of the four divisions, and one motor ambulance column, were available for working the system. The wounded were brought



staff such as had been engendered by no previous operation excepting perhaps the skilful evacuation of Gallipoli. As for the showing of the 3rd Division, its spirited yet controlled advance in precise accordance with plan, in spite of the powerful effort of the German artillery to crush this flank during the approach march and afterwards, was altogether admirable. The comparative severity of the fighting on the southern flank is shown by the fact that the II Anzac Corps suffered more than half the 26,000 casualties incurred on the British side in this battle.<sup>129</sup>

to the regimental aid posts by regimental bearers, specially increased in the 3rd Division by twenty per battalion. In the 40th Battalion the band was still being used for stretcher-bearing, but, as nine of its members were hit, and the band was especially required during rest after battle, this practice was afterwards discontinued.

From the R.A.P.'s evacuation was carried out by the field-ambulance bearers. On the southern route there were two collecting stations for "walking" wounded ("Hyde Park Corner" and Touquet Berthe under Majors E. F. Lind, of Williamstown, Vic., and J. J. McMahon, of Kew, Vic.), and an advanced dressing station at "Charing Cross" (under Major S. R. Burston, of Adelaide)—the whole three under Lieutenant-Colonel M. H. Downey (Parkside, S. Aust.) of the 11th Field Ambulance; and a corps main dressing station for 300 "lying down" cases at Pont d'Achelle, under Lieutenant-Colonel F. A. Maguire (Sydney), 9th Field Ambulance, with a collecting station for 400 "walking" wounded beside it. So as to leave the field ambulances mobile, the six bearer subdivisions which carried out the evacuation were provided by taking one from each of six different field ambulances—the 4th, 12th, and 13th (4th Australian Division), and 9th, 10th, and 11th (3rd Australian Division). All these bearers were under Lieutenant-Colonel J. S. Purdy (Sydney) of the 10th Field Ambulance, at Charing Cross. The tramways were used, where possible, for "lying down" cases. The arrangements on the northern route were similar, but the personnel mainly New Zealand and British.

The ambulance bearers encountered heavy shell-fire. Sergeant A. T. Wilkins (Newcastle, N.S.W.), 4th Field Ambulance, himself wounded, led his bearers through the severe artillery-fire on June 8, as did Captain R. C. Winn (Sydney) of the same ambulance, who lost a foot through his wounds. In the southern area the advanced dressing station at Charing Cross in Ploegsteert Wood was in the midst of batteries, and was heavily shelled (as had been foretold by General Monash, who wished it to be placed away to the flank). Wounded were brought from loading points to the main dressing station by wheeled transport returning empty from the dumps, and by a few cars of the field ambulances. Anti-tetanic serum was given here, and slight cases were diverted to divisional rest stations at L'Estrade (for sick) and Steenwerck (slight wounds and shell-shock).

From the main dressing station the motor ambulance column carried the stretcher cases to the casualty clearing stations at Bailleul and Trois Arbres, walking wounded being taken by 35 specially allotted lorries; these ran a five minutes' bus service from the main dressing station to the rest station and casualty clearing stations, and in two days carried 5,000 walking wounded.

Near Bailleul was No. 1 A.C.C.S. and three British stations, and at Trois Arbres No. 2 A.C.C.S. (it had been there for nearly a year). Australian nurses were working in them. No. 2 A.C.C.S. in 48 hours admitted 2,830 patients, and cleared 2,579. Many serious cases reached the station within three hours of being wounded; 1,025 operations were performed. During the Messines offensive No. 1 A.C.C.S. was bombed by enemy airmen seeking to hit the railway or other targets. Sister R. Pratt (Mumbannar and East Malvern, Vic.) was hit by a fragment of a bomb, and several sisters were injured by flying fragments of glass, but, as in all such cases, the sisters behaved bravely and coolly. The 11th British C.C.S. at Bailleul lost at this time 35 killed and 59 wounded.

<sup>129</sup> The II Anzac casualties, including those of the 25th British Division, were about 13,900; those of the IX Corps about 4,000. Those of the X Corps are not stated, but would be about 8,000. The loss in the divisions of II Anzac was

N.Z. Division—150 officers and 4,828 others; 25th Division—158 and 3,221; 3rd Aust. Division—112 and 4,010; 4th Aust. Division—108 and 2,569. Particulars of casualties in the Australian infantry are:

3rd Aust. Division			4th Aust. Division		
	Offrs.	O. Ranks		Offrs.	O. Ranks
<i>9th Bde.</i>			<i>12th Bde.</i>		
33 Bn.	8	382	45 Bn.	16	552
34 Bn.	10	378	46 Bn.	3	124
35 Bn.	5	431	47 Bn.	16	447
30 Bn.	9	421	48 Bn.	4	62
9 M.G. Coy.	2	17	12 M.G. Coy.	2	33
9 L.T.M.	1	2	12 L.T.M.	3	17
	—	—		—	—
	35	1,631		44	1,235
<i>10th Bde.</i>			<i>13th Bde.</i>		
37 Bn.	10	398	49 Bn.	12	367
38 Bn.	9	248	50 Bn.	10	139
39 Bn.	14	292	51 Bn.	5	108
40 Bn.	6	345	52 Bn.	15	310
10 M.G. Coy.	3	32	13 M.G. Coy.	4	28
10 L.T.M.	—	6	13 L.T.M.	—	12
	—	—		—	—
	42	1,321		46	964
<i>11th Bde.</i>			<i>4th Bde.</i>		
41 Bn.	8	126		11	211
42 Bn.	7	202			
43 Bn.	4	118			
44 Bn.	9	248			
11 M.G. Coy.	3	21			
11 L.T.M.	—	6			
	—	—			
	31	721			

The 3rd Divisional Engineers lost 77, A.A.M.C. 56, artillery 29, pioneers 164. In the 4th Division the engineers lost 39, A.A.M.C. 29, artillery 27, pioneers 66.

The German casualties were estimated by British G.H.Q. at 39,000. Figures recently supplied by the courtesy of the *Reichsarchiv* show that the actual loss was: 21-31 May—1,963; 1-10 June—19,923 (including 7,548 missing); 11-20 June—5,501; 21-30 June—1,773. The British figures are in most cases those of casualties incurred in the period June 1-14. The corresponding German figure would therefore be about 23,000. It has been ascertained from the *Reichsarchiv* that the calculations made by the Germans as to their losses in single actions rest on reports sent in by the troops every ten days, and that these include all casualties. German unit histories give the following details. In the 3rd Bavarian Division, the 17th Regiment, opposite the 25th Division and New Zealanders, lost 34 officers and 1,151 others, and the 18th—opposite the New Zealanders and 10th Australian Brigade—14 officers and 1,084 others. In the 4th Bavarian Division, the 9th Regiment (opposite the 9th Australian Brigade) lost 26 officers and 850 others. The casualties of the rest of the 4th Bavarian Division, of the 1st Guard Reserve Division, and of elements of the 7th and 11th Divisions and 16th Bavarian Division that came against II Anzac, are not shown in available records.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE THIRD BATTLE OF YPRES

WHILE the II Anzac Corps was fighting at Messines, I Anzac (now 1st, 2nd, and 5th Divisions) was enjoying what was probably the longest, most complete, and most pleasant rest ever given to British infantry in France. It had not been given without cause. Since July 1916, except for the short interval of comparative quiet in the Ypres salient, I Anzac had been continuously in the line under conditions of heavy strain. Not only the summer fighting at Pozières and the second inset on the Somme in the late autumn deserve to be reckoned as battle service—the tenure of the Flers–Gueudecourt front during the winter was hardly less strenuous; and through the chance that, at the winter's end when others were training, I Anzac had to take over a two-corps front and put all four divisions<sup>1</sup> in line, one of the heaviest burdens of the Somme winter campaign had fallen on the Australian troops. From it they had passed without pause to the pursuit of the German withdrawal, involving a dozen sharp little fights. Although this advance of itself had raised their spirit, the higher commanders had intended to withdraw them for the new attack-training, which they had not yet received. But the decision that the Fifth Army should assault the Hindenburg Line had not only involved the corps in “First Bullecourt” and the German counter-stroke at Lagnicourt, but had brought back its divisions from rest, one after the other, to go through the mill of “Second Bullecourt.”

In this, as in other wars, no order caused such bitterness as when tired troops, coming out of battle for a promised rest, were suddenly commanded to go back into the line—especially if they saw other well-rested units more favourably treated. Under much more serious circumstances this order led to mutiny in the French and German Armies, and even—sixteen months later—in the Australian. All such troubles were still far from the Australian force, as from the British, and were nowhere less dreamed of than in the 5th Australian

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<sup>1</sup> It then included the 4th Division also.

Division which, as it happened, suffered least severely of the Australian divisions, both this year and during the war.<sup>2</sup> But it had a commander—General Hobbs—intensely sensitive to the feeling of his men, quick to sense an injustice, and apprehensive of the possible effects. On May 9th when Birdwood told him, with regret, that the division must leave its rest and go into Second Bullecourt, Hobbs spoke out. As a senior Australian officer, he said, he felt that he should tell Birdwood that there was much talk among the troops, who thought that they were not getting as much rest as was afforded to other divisions. Birdwood replied that he believed that all troops were treated alike, being rested in turn when opportunity offered. Hobbs answered that, unfortunately, as far as his men could see, this was not the case; they happened to find themselves billeted next to two divisions of which one, the 11th, had been out of the line for three months<sup>3</sup> and the other, the Guards, for seven weeks. He felt that the men's letters, if published in Australia, might affect recruiting there. General White, chief of Birdwood's staff, had also been impressed with the urgency of the need for rest, and, on finding the higher staffs disinclined to represent this need to Haig, had told Major-General Malcolm,<sup>4</sup> M.G.G.S. of the Fifth Army, that he would never again give his concurrence in the sending overseas of an Australian force unless it had on the staff of the commander-in-chief a representative with the unquestioned right of placing its point of view before the "chief."

The 5th Division was sent in, and played its full part; but Birdwood was so impressed by Hobbs's representations that he wrote of them fully to Gough, who forwarded them to the chief of Haig's general staff, Lieutenant-General Kiggell. Kiggell did not trouble the Commander-in-Chief with the matter, but steps were quickly taken to ensure the promised rest. The 1st Australian Division, which was on the point of carrying out an order to relieve the 11th (British) in

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<sup>2</sup> Its loss in 1917 was 7,471. The 1st lost 9,082, 2nd 12,375; 3rd 13,315; 4th 12,110.

<sup>3</sup> The 11th was now holding the southern sector of the I Anzac front, and immediately afterwards went north and took part on the left of II Anzac in the Battle of Messines.

<sup>4</sup> Major-Gen. Sir Neill Malcolm, K.C.B., D.S.O., p.s.c. M.G.G.S., Fifth Army, 1916/17; commanded 66th Div., 1917/18, 39th Div., 1918. Officer of British Regular Army, of London, b Argyll, Scotland, 8 Oct., 1869.

the southern sector of the Anzac line, was replaced by the 48th (British), and the 2nd, 1st, and 5th, as they successively emerged from Bullecourt, were sent to the quiet back-area north and east of Amiens, and to the old Somme battlefield, now silent moorland covered with poppies and other weeds.<sup>5</sup> Here they began their period of rest and training which eventually lasted four months. During its early weeks came news of the victory at Messines, and soon afterwards there filtered through rumours of preparations for the much greater undertaking at the Ypres salient.

The French and British policy for the offensive in France during the remainder of 1917 had been agreed on at the conference in Paris on May 4th.<sup>6</sup> The change of tactics approved by that conference—the sure, step-by-step, wearing-down method—bore the stamp of General Pétain; and, as Haig and Robertson also cordially approved of it, any possible British objection to Pétain's displacing Nivelle seemed to have disappeared. By May 15th Painlevé had induced the French Cabinet to take this step. Nivelle was forced to retire. Pétain became Commander-in-Chief; and, to replace him as Chief of the General Staff in Paris, the Government brought back General Foch, who had received no command in the field since the Battle of the Somme.

The concerted policy of France and Great Britain now was that the plan of great concentric Allied strokes agreed on at Chantilly should be adhered to, even if modified, France and Britain striking with all their might (though Britain would take the lead), and calling on Italy and Russia to strike also. It fell to Pétain to arrange with Haig the action by which the French Army would carry out its part under the agreement. Doubtless both Pétain and the French ministers at first intended action more or less in the spirit of the Chantilly policy; but there must have reached them, when the conference of May 4th was actually assembling, news of an occurrence behind the French line, which, frequently repeated in the following weeks, was to render worthless any

<sup>5</sup> The 5th was originally to have been sent to II Anzac for Messines. When it had to be used for Bullecourt, the 4th was sent instead.

<sup>6</sup> See pp. 549-51.

promises of such effort. According to the incomplete accounts so far published, on May 3rd the camp of the 2nd French Colonial Division, which had been brought out of the line after the Aisne battle, was placarded with notices expressing the troops' refusal to go back again while many of their countrymen were receiving fifteen or twenty francs a day for working in factories. On May 19th a battalion of the IX French Corps, when ordered back into the line, dispersed into the woods. On May 20th serious local mutinies occurred; others flared out on the 26th, 27th, and 29th, always in the areas behind the line. One unit, when ordered to the trenches, demanded leave; another boarded a train in defiance of its officers; a third protested against the Government's unreadiness to listen to proposals of peace. Within five weeks of the cessation of Nivelle's offensive there occurred in sixteen different army corps mutinies of troops who alleged that they had been sacrificed by treacherous or inefficient generals, that their own artillery had turned its guns upon them, that the "Boche," like themselves, was unconquerable, but that the governments and the well-paid factory hands would never make peace unless their own armies forced them to do so.

The simultaneity of these outbursts, and the occurrence of civil disturbances elsewhere in France, instantly gave rise to the suspicion that they were organised by secret and powerful defeatist agencies. For the rest of the year French politics became to a large extent a campaign for hunting down enemy agents—some real, and many more suspected—in high places. There did exist in the country at this time, not only many honest pacifists largely associated with the pre-war syndicalist organisations, whose activities had naturally been stimulated by the Russian revolution, but also some dangerously influential men and women, who, in pursuance of their own financial or other interests, were engaged in intrigues countering the effort of the mass of their countrymen. Part of their endeavour was to spread a propaganda of defeatism in the press, throughout the public, and among the soldiers, who were daily caught and interviewed as they arrived on leave at the Parisian railway stations. The breakdown of G.Q.G.'s medical arrangements for receiving casualties during the offensive had led to a large overflow of wounded to the back areas, spreading an impression of losses far greater than the

actual total, enormous though that was. Reports of disaster, and other propaganda, spreading among soldiers on leave or divisions in the rest area, intensified the troops' indignation at the excessive test that had been imposed upon them.

But that the mutinies were the result of a deep semi-political plot is a notion wholly unsupported by the evidence. They were the natural reaction of men, already subjected to years of strain, against a command which had ordered them to achieve an impossibility. When for the fourth year in succession their leaders had asked them to fling the Germans out of France, this time with bolder promises than ever before, their gallant spirit had risen to the occasion. But within half-a-day they had recognised that the task set them was one which no army in the world could have achieved, and in the attempt they had been slaughtered as perhaps men never before had been. If, in the next seven weeks, protests broke out in twenty places, it was only because the same cause, operating everywhere, led to the same effects. Being Frenchmen, they had risen to the effort with special exaltation, and their sudden depression was all the deeper. Yet in very few cases did they turn upon their officers. "You have fought as well as we," they said. "We do not wish you any harm, but we have had enough. This war must stop."

Obviously the course they were taking could lead only to defeat and misery for their nation. In many cases their officers soon had them in control again. The French authorities were extraordinarily successful in preventing news of these mutinies from spreading through the army and reaching the outside world. Single incidents became known locally, and some were more widely reported, as when a draft of young infantrymen marched through the streets "baa-ing" like sheep, to indicate that they were being driven like lambs to the slaughter-house. But until long afterwards no more than a rumour of local troubles leaked through to most of the British Army; the diary of Sir Henry Wilson, at Pétain's headquarters, gives during May no hint of any true conception of the events; and, although by July 2nd the German staff had obtained a more accurate summary than any that reached the French or British public until after the war, it was then too late to make use of that knowledge.

But to those French authorities who alone were fully informed, the occurrences during the second half of May caused tense anxiety. To Pétain, Foch, and the French Government it was obvious that the French Army was not equal to the resumption of a sustained struggle like that of the Somme, however carefully planned; its capacity even for single, limited strokes must have seemed doubtful. Yet when Pétain on May 18th, immediately on his appointment, went to meet Haig at Amiens, the British commander showed him a telegram received from Robertson two days before, saying that Lloyd George agreed to continue the British offensive, as arranged on May 4th, only if the French used all available troops to help. Haig gave Pétain a programme of the British offensive, and Pétain promised to support it by making certain attacks. But he informed Haig that there was no longer any hope of his being able to undertake the relief of the British Army farther north than the River Omignon. Sir Henry Wilson, on hearing of Pétain's promises, considered them too vague; in conversation with Pétain he gathered that the French attacks would be mere single strokes, the fighting in each case to cease within a day or two, when the limited objectives were gained. He did not believe that Haig realised this, and he urged Pétain to make it clear before the British, expecting more assistance, plunged into their great offensive.<sup>7</sup> To Pétain, conscious of the secret trouble in his army, Wilson's urgency was irksome, and the behaviour even of Foch, a close friend, showed Wilson that at this time his presence at G.Q.G. was not desired. Haig—who, Wilson thought, did not understand the French—and Pétain preferred to deal with each other direct rather than through him. At Pétain's request Wilson was recalled.

The first of the French supporting attacks was to be made almost at once on the Aisne battlefield during the British offensive at Messines. But mutinies were still flaring out. On June 2nd, a company of French infantry started from the front to march on Paris. It was stopped, but General Maistre now warned Pétain that the Sixth Army required rest and that, if its leaders persisted in the offensive, "we run the

<sup>7</sup> According to Brigadier-General J. Charteris in his life of Haig, p. 269, Pétain did not wish the British to engage in extensive unlimited operations.



risk of seeing our men refuse to leave the trenches." Pétain, after seeing Foch and Painlevé, sent the chief of his staff, General Debeney, to Haig with a frank explanation that the morale of the French Army would not allow of its delivering an infantry attack on June 10th, or for at least a month afterwards. With Haig's concurrence, this attack was cancelled.

The French Army was, in fact, seriously bending under the enormous strain of three years of the Great War, and for Pétain and the French Government there could now be only one immediate war-aim, to nurse it back to its former toughness. For this task Pétain was precisely the leader required; he had a magnificent second in Foch, and Painlevé, though he has been bitterly criticised, devoted his active brain to the effort. Powerful influences from England and even from France urged these three to commit the French Army to a supreme effort like that of the British at Ypres, but, whatever their promises on May 4th, they now made no pretence—at least, to their French critics—of any intention to fulfil them. Painlevé's book, *Comment j'ai nommé Foch et Pétain*, is largely a claim for the credit of having resisted this demand. The new plan of Pétain, Foch, and Painlevé was a rigid defensive—except for two or three limited attacks to help the English—until the Americans should be ready in 1918. Behind this defensive they would build up their army and an immense accumulation of material; they would double their heavy, quick-firing artillery, enormously increase their air fleet, build 3,000 small tanks, and supply an enormous quantity of smoke shell to mask them, and of poison-gas shell. Thus in 1918 victory should be certain. To all who urged an immediate effort in combination with, and on the same scale as, the British offensive, Pétain replied: "I am waiting for the Americans and the tanks!"

Meanwhile he nursed his army. He obtained the Government's consent to stronger measures against mutineers, propaganda, and agitation,<sup>8</sup> and at the same time assiduously visited his troops, speaking to officers and men, investigating and exhorting; never familiar, but simple, just, and direct.

<sup>8</sup> Nivelle had asked for these in February. They were denied to him, and Painlevé would not give, even to Pétain, all the powers requested, for example, the abolition of the right of appeal to the President against military sentence. The President, however, agreed not to exercise his powers of revision.

He gave them home leave once in four months, which meant a withdrawal of over 300,000 men from the front. At the same time he brought to trial the leading mutineers in the affected units; 150 men were condemned to death, but only 23 were shot and the remainder sent to serve in the colonies. The trouble was swiftly ended—it is said that no collective refusal to obey occurred after June 10th; and the shaken morale of the French Army began slowly to recover.

This recovery is one of the most astonishing incidents of the war. The position early in June is described by Sir Henry Wilson, whose eyes were opened by a final visit to the French front at Verdun:

The younger men are tired and depressed; the women are ditto; be careful. . . . Be careful, don't ask too much, and gain some successes. Always the same story.

Clemenceau, then President of the War Commission in the French Senate, told him that they must wait for the Americans and not lose men, and that he liked Pétain just because he would not attack. By these tactics and with the help of a too little recognised quality of toughness, the French Army and people recovered. But how far the same leaders who claimed credit for refusing to engage their army in "a second Battle of the Somme" definitely relied upon the British Army engaging in one and fighting it single-handed during the rest of the year, is not yet fully known. Haig afterwards stated that he had not divulged to anyone the urgent appeals received from Pétain during this crisis.<sup>9</sup> There is no doubt that these largely influenced his employment of the British Empire's forces in the Third Battle of Ypres. But the insistence of the British Admiralty carried perhaps even more weight.

During 1917 war weariness was powerfully affecting all the original combatants. Its most important results had occurred in Russia. But in June Kerensky, to the surprise of the other Allies, succeeded in bringing the more loyal Russian units to

**War weariness  
elsewhere**

<sup>9</sup> Sir William Robertson, in *Soldiers and Statesmen*, Vol. II, p. 238, says that during the period of the mutinies Pétain naturally wished the British to be as aggressive as possible. Brigadier-General Charteris, on the other hand, says that Pétain believed "that . . . the British as well as the French Armies should confine their fighting to small operations with limited objectives." According to the diary of Sir H. Wilson, Foch was opposed to Haig's strategy in Flanders.

an offensive. Launched on July 1st, it made during the next fortnight remarkable progress, chiefly against the Austrians, greatly cheering the Allies and causing extreme anxiety to the German leaders. But here there occurred the very development that Pétain and Painlevé feared if they undertook a general offensive in France: the morale of the troops was unable to sustain the effort, and, when on July 19th the German reserve counter-attacked, they melted like snow. At the same time the Bolshevik party obtained control of Petrograd, and by the end of July it was certain that, at least for purposes of the Chantilly plan, Russia was out of the war.

In England, and much more in Germany and Austria, the strain was showing itself in increasing peace-talk which, however strongly opposed by patriotic sentiment, was not so liable as in France to be regarded as treachery.<sup>10</sup> The inclination to end the war was most evident in Austria, and at secret interviews in Switzerland the chance of detaching Austria from Germany was probed by the Allies. In Germany, where hope of winning the war on land or sea had for the moment died low, there was widespread chafing at the Government's continued failure to state its terms of peace.<sup>11</sup> The Chancellor and military chiefs had never yet even renounced the intention of annexing or controlling Belgium. The German masses, then at least, did not stand for annexation, which obviously put peace out of question.<sup>12</sup>

On July 5th, when the Reichstag had to be summoned to vote war funds, the Chancellor, von Bethmann Hollweg, was surprised by a powerful demand, launched by Herr Erzberger, a Catholic leader who had been in touch with Austria, that the Government must declare its readiness to make a reasonable peace without annexations or indemnities on either side. Erzberger further demanded that the Prussian people should be given parliamentary government. An acute crisis arose.

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<sup>10</sup> The tendency culminated, in England, in the publication in November of Lord Lansdowne's famous letter reviewing the possible conditions on which Germany might be ready to negotiate for peace.

<sup>11</sup> For President Wilson's request for this, and the replies of Germany and of her opponents, see pp. 51-6.

<sup>12</sup> Letters captured on German soldiers at Ypres illustrate the general feelings. A girl in Breslau wrote that boys of 17 or 18 were being called up for service, "and there are still people who think we can never make peace unless we get Belgium. What use would Belgium be to me?" A man on the staff of the 82nd Reserve Division wrote: "There will probably be no peace till the same thing happens as in Russia. Otherwise England will not discuss terms with our Emperor, and we are no longer in a position to force her to do so."

The Chancellor, though resisting, really leant to the popular view. The Emperor and Crown Prince gave way on the question of the Prussian franchise. Hindenburg and Ludendorff, who had hurried to Berlin, were given to understand that this was no business of theirs, and the Chancellor's resignation was refused. They determined to force him out of office, and accordingly sent in their resignations; but already, after a conference between the Crown Prince and the Reichstag leaders, the Emperor had altered his decision. Bethmann Hollweg fell, and a little-known Prussian official, Dr. Michaelis, took his place. The policy of Michaelis, though obscure at the time, apparently aimed at satisfying the military chiefs by drawing the teeth of any peace-action by the Reichstag. This he did by straining the interpretation of a resolution, now passed by the Reichstag on July 19th, in favour of a peace by understanding, without annexations.

The Reichstag's gesture had one important result. It counted for little in Germany, where the military chiefs were now secure; but, reinforced by the separate action of the Pope, who now invited both sides to consider terms of peace, it drew from Allied statesmen replies which cleared the position. The Pope's proposal appeared to favour a return to pre-war territorial boundaries. The British Government's attitude, indicated in an earlier speech by Lloyd George, was that the inhabitants of any territory in dispute should have the right of determining their own allegiance. This principle was probably considered by most British people to be a just one. But Lloyd George's omission of any reference to France's unconditional claim to Alsace-Lorraine caused much criticism in France; and in Australia W. M. Hughes, foreseeing that such a peace might necessitate the handing back of German New Guinea, at once stated that it must not be assumed that the Australian Government concurred. French discontent forced the British Prime Minister in September to declare his support for the claim to Alsace-Lorraine.<sup>13</sup> President Wilson's reply to the Pope's invitation took ground, in which the common opinion at least of the British Army solidly supported him,<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Balfour indicated his personal support for it a few days before Lloyd George. Declarations were also made by Asquith and Churchill.

<sup>14</sup> The same point had been made by Lloyd George referring to the speech of Michaelis. The Allies, he said, could not trust the present Government of Germany in making peace, but "we could make peace with a free Germany."

that peace could not be made with the present autocratic Government of Germany, which would merely use such a peace to recuperate its strength for another war.

It thus became evident that Germany's opponents would demand the unconditional return of Alsace-Lorraine to France, and the establishment of genuine democracy in Germany. The former demand neither the Reichstag nor the German people would then consider—nor would the Emperor the latter—unless beaten to their knees. By October, although the Reichstag was still troubled by controversy, which originated in a disclosure of mutiny in the German fleet, and which eventually led to the replacement of Michaelis by Count Hertling,<sup>15</sup> serious peace-talk had ended, and events then occurring swung German feeling in a very different direction.

In the circumstances just related, the carrying out of anything like the true Chantilly policy could not long remain within hope. Italy launched offensives, each successful at first, on May 12th and August 17th; France made single attacks—comparable to the Messines offensive—on August 20th and October 23rd, and with an army of six divisions assisted in Haig's operation in Flanders; and Russia began her short-lived general offensive on July 1st. But, even to the most optimistic mind, all prospect of successful all-round pressure by the Allies must have disappeared when Pétain on June 4th revoked the offer of French support during the Messines offensive. From that day it must have been clear to Haig that the assistance from the French Army would, to say the least, be much less than he and the British Government on May 4th had required.

Yet Sir Henry Wilson found him strangely undisturbed by the prospect.<sup>16</sup> The inner history of Haig's conduct of British strategy at this time has still to be made known; but it is obvious that in continuing to plan his Flanders offensive, although the British Government had warned him that the undertaking must be conditional upon the French also attacking with all available troops, he was assuming a formidable

<sup>15</sup> Premier of Bavaria, then 74 years of age.

<sup>16</sup> See Wilson's *Life and Diaries* edited by Major-General Sir C. E. Callwell, Vol. I, p. 360.

responsibility. It does not by any means follow that Haig was wrong; but from this moment his policy and that of the Prime Minister again diverged, and, although the political leader has been charged with inconsistency, dispassionate study does not tend to confirm this. Lloyd George, when he lent his support to Haig's scheme, had in view the Admiralty's representations, but he was also endeavouring, like Haig, to re-establish the principle of united offensive by the Allies. He never dreamed of committing the British Empire to a practically single-handed effort to bend back the enemy's flank on the Western Front; and from the moment when, in spite of Haig's complacency, he suspected—and rightly—that French assistance would fail, the Prime Minister returned to the alternative that he had always before favoured, of trying to "knock away Germany's props."

Not only Lloyd George but every other member of the War Committee feared that Haig's scheme of a titanic, almost unsupported, struggle against the strongest defences of the strongest enemy might be a fatal mistake. But when the question arose of what else should be done, each favoured a different course. All felt that strong pressure must be exerted in some direction to prevent Germany from attacking not only France but Russia and Italy. Even a soldier as strongly opposed to the proceedings of the War Cabinet as Sir William Robertson admits that it was

very difficult for the British authorities to know what to do for the best. One thing they could not do—remain inactive.

A War Policy Committee<sup>17</sup> was formed to explore the suggested projects. Lloyd George favoured a joint offensive in Italy, to put Austria out of the war,<sup>18</sup> but he could not convince his colleagues. On June 20th in the course of its almost desperate investigations, the War Policy Committee called Haig to London and closely questioned him. He and Robertson consistently opposed all projects for directing British effort elsewhere than on the Western Front, and Cabinet reluctantly permitted him to proceed tentatively with the massive preparations in Flanders.

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<sup>17</sup> Consisting of Lloyd George, Lords Curzon and Milner, and General Smuts.

<sup>18</sup> The stroke proposed was the capture of Trieste, which was less distant from the Italian front than Ostend from the British; but there was no certainty that its capture would have caused Austria to make peace, and the operation invited a reply like the stroke later made by the Germans at Caporetto.

Haig's intention was to strike on July 25th, and, from the Battle of Messines onwards, the whole effort of the B.E.F. was steadily concentrated to that end. Until the third week in July the Government withheld authority for launching the actual blow, but both Robertson and Haig knew that its authorisation was increasingly certain as time wore on without an alternative decision being made.<sup>19</sup> On July 18th a member of the Cabinet assured Robertson that Haig's plan would have his utmost support provided he could be sure of Haig's adherence to the "step-by-step" method of attack. The War Cabinet ministers all feared that Haig might be tempted to push on beyond the protection of his artillery, and incur losses like those of the French on the Aisne. Robertson, who agreed as to the danger that would follow such a proceeding, gave an assurance that he thought there need be no fear of Haig's going beyond the protection of his guns "until . . . a real break-through occurs." That week the Cabinet authorised Haig to attack. Lloyd George agreed, believing that, if, after the first week or two, the results proved incommensurate with the loss, the attack, being on "step-by-step" lines, could be stopped and other plans tried. Robertson was instructed to assure Haig of the Cabinet's "whole-hearted support."

But while Haig intended generally to adhere to "step-by-step" tactics, he never lost sight of the strategic victory which he hoped to gain by breaking through the Germans in Flanders when their demoralisation should give him the opportunity. It was possibly for this reason that he placed in charge of the main stroke General Gough instead of General Rawlinson, a confirmed believer in the limited attack.<sup>20</sup> In all, 34 British and 6 French divisions were gathered in Flanders. Five of them formed a separate force—the Fourth Army, under General Rawlinson—on the coast, where they were to strike only when the main attack was shaking the enemy by driving him beyond the Passchendaele–Staden Ridge. The remaining 35, comprising three armies, would launch or support the offensive on a 15-mile front from south of Warneton to

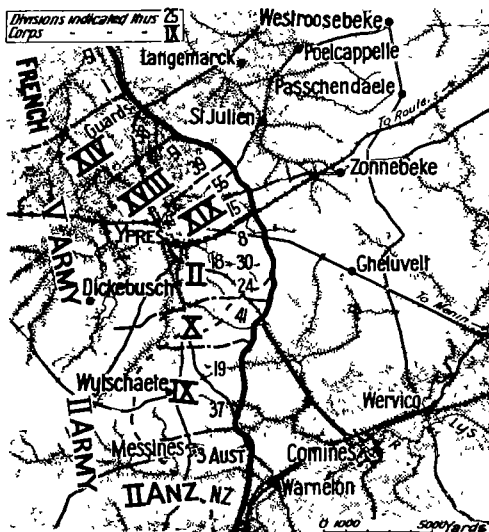
<sup>19</sup> See *Soldiers and Statesmen*, Vol. II, p. 247.

<sup>20</sup> See p. 726 and Vol. III (p. 237).

Steenstraat. On the 6 southern miles of this front the Second Army of 13 divisions under General Plumer would attack with 5 of its divisions; on the central 7 miles, Gough's Fifth Army of 16 divisions would deliver the main attack, using 10 divisions; and, on the northern 2 miles, General Anthoine's First French Army of 6 divisions would attack with 2 divisions. General Pétain was particularly anxious that the French should assist in this offensive, probably hoping, with reason, that the stout optimism of the British

"Tommies" would be infused into his co-operating troops.

It was hoped that, if the main offensive went well, the Fifth Army would have captured the Passchendaele-Staden heights and be launching its later offensive beyond them in time to enable the coastal attack to catch the high tides of August 7th or 8th.<sup>21</sup> As this part of the ridge was from 5 to 8 miles distant, the plans obviously assumed the possibility of rapid advance in the early stages. When, five weeks beforehand, the objectives for the first day's fighting were being worked out, the inconsistency of this assumption with the principles of the "step-by-step" attack was anxiously questioned in a well thought-out staff monograph, written, as has lately been disclosed, by Major-General Davidson,<sup>22</sup> Director of Military Operations at G.H.Q. Should the first



*The forces for "Third Ypres."*

<sup>21</sup> If not, the coastal attack must wait until late August or early September.

<sup>22</sup> Major-Gen. Sir J. H. Davidson, K.C.M.G., C.B., D.S.O., p.s.c. Officer of British Regular Army; of Fareham, Hants, Eng; b. Mauritius, 24 July, 1876.



day's advance exceed 1,500-3,000 yards? The sureness of the system depended on the troops arriving at their objective so well in hand that they could consolidate a straight, clean line from which to launch their next advance two or three days later. Admittedly they could gain an ostensible advantage by thrusting deeper in the first attack, but would it be a real one? The German reserves would be brought up to face them whether the thrust was shallow or deep; and it was surely better for the attacking troops to be fresh, strong, and organised when they met this enemy than to be tired, disorganised, and depleted. If the objective was deep, there would have to be wholesale reliefs before the next blow, and the artillery would have to be advanced over shattered ground. After a succession of limited blows, General Davidson admitted, the British command might be justified in taking risks, but only on proof that the Germans were generally—and not merely locally—demoralised. General Gough, on the other hand, in his written comments upon this paper, contended that the attacking force would waste a valuable opportunity if it did not reap from the first attack all the advantages possible; the first organised stroke should be quickly followed by others, but he did not favour limiting these too strictly in depth. After conference, the objectives for the main attack were laid at the three German trench-systems, distant from the start, roughly, 1,000, 2,000, and 3,500 yards; a fourth line, along the ridge at Broodseinde, was to be reached by exploitation, if opportunity offered. General Gough now urged<sup>23</sup> that only the second objective should be aimed at on the first day—from now on, throughout the offensive, he seems consistently to have advocated shallow, limited objectives; but General Plumer pressed for the deeper offensive, and his view was approved.

The fact stands out that not only was the whole Flanders offensive planned with a largely strategical object, but the first stroke in it was devised, not as a closely limited battle of attrition on the lines favoured by Pétain and Robertson, but with mixed aims—to penetrate as well as to wear out.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> See *The Fifth Army*, p. 198.

<sup>24</sup> On June 14 Haig told his army commanders that in the plan of the whole offensive, underlying the intention of wearing out the enemy, was the strategical objective of securing the Belgian coast and connecting with the Dutch frontier. At a later stage he indicated his intention as: "Wear down the enemy, but at the same time have an objective."

A breach was not expected to be achieved so early as in the first thrust on the Somme, but the strategical motive was actually stronger at Ypres. Here again, it by no means follows that Haig was wrong, but in this mixture of motives lay grave disadvantages. In a battle of attrition surprise was not vital. It might actually be an advantage that the enemy, expecting attack, should have brought up strong reserves, and should be led to thrust them under the overwhelming artillery, whose special object was their destruction. But if an early break-through was intended, surprise was all-important. To the ordinary rank and file, at the time, it seemed that the British command had given up all hope of deceiving the enemy as to the geographical direction of its great offensives in 1917, and that the preparations were therefore carried through quite openly. It was evident that, in choosing to attack at Ypres, Haig must be deliberately facing the fact that the concentration of his troops, artillery, and stores, would be carried out under the eyes of German observers, to whom that ground was exposed. Even had the area been hidden, the long drawn-out preparations for this, the greatest "battle of material" ever fought—the making of roads, railways, tramways, and dumps, and the bringing up of previously unheard-of masses of ammunition and artillery—must have been detected by the enemy, unless the German airmen were entirely suppressed, which at this time they were not.

The truth is that Haig well knew that, as at the Somme and Arras, the Germans could not fail to anticipate an offensive, but he hoped to deceive them at least as to the time, nature, and direction of the stroke. He had intended, first, by the use of divisions which the French had promised to relieve at Havrincourt, to create the impression that the Arras offensive was still continuing. When Pétain cancelled the Havrincourt relief, this feint at Arras had to be abandoned.<sup>25</sup> Haig's second effort at deception aimed at creating the impression that the preparations at Ypres portended an attack on Lille. Accordingly on June 26th and 28th the 3rd and 4th Canadian and 46th British Divisions attacked near Lens, pretending to drive towards Lille from the south-west. The

<sup>25</sup> Small divisional attacks made on June 14 beyond Monchy le Preux, and on the 15th near Bullecourt, were obviously insufficient to simulate an offensive of importance.

Messines offensive and activity at Ypres might suggest a corresponding effort to encircle Lille from the north-west, and the Second Army was accordingly ordered to convey this impression as far as possible.

It is obvious, however, that no great degree of surprise could reasonably be expected. At best the German reserves would be close, and the attack would be faced by an enemy deeply disposed in strong defence-lines, which in wet weather would become almost impassable—a recognised risk attaching to any offensive in Flanders. Moreover behind the German reserves in France stood a large potential reserve which, in extreme need, Germany could withdraw from the Russian front. In all these circumstances tactics of attrition—"step-by-step" methods—were obviously the most practicable; but several times during the offensive Haig's belief that the Germans' morale might break at any moment, and his vision of decisive results if they were driven from the coast, attracted him to other tactics.

So obvious were the preparations, and so widely had the coastal offensive been discussed, especially in Great Britain,<sup>26</sup> that it arouses no surprise to learn that never, after the battle of Messines, had Crown Prince Rupprecht the least uncertainty as to the imminence of Haig's offensive at Ypres. The Lens feint was well carried out, but it could not deceive an enemy so thoroughly enlightened.

On June 12 the Crown Prince Rupprecht, and on June 9 the headquarters of the Fourth German Army (holding the Flanders front), described a coming British offensive there as "certain." The insertion of additional German divisions to strengthen the Ypres front, and of others in rear for purposes of counter-attack, began at once. The form of the offensive was judged with perfect accuracy—an attack to free the Belgian coast, assisted by a landing from the sea and by two "limited" offensives by the French.<sup>27</sup> A captured British flying officer said that an attack upon Lille was intended, but Prince Rupprecht thought it unlikely.

The preparations for the Canadian attack at Lens, which had purposely been inflated by the bringing thither of guns on their way northwards from the Third Army, did thoroughly deceive the German army facing it—the Sixth. On June 25, just before the Canadian attack,

<sup>26</sup> The diary of an Australian, then on leave in England, says—"Everyone in England was talking of the coming British offensive. I heard more of it there than in France. . . . The first thing X—asked me was 'Well, Z—, when is the big offensive along the coast coming?' I pretended to know nothing. It simply shocked me to hear the way people talked."

<sup>27</sup> See Crown Prince Rupprecht's diary for June 16. Painlevé, the French Minister of War, in an indiscreet speech on July 7, made the limited nature of the French effort clear to all the world.

the Sixth Army reported that it observed all the signs of a great offensive—such as concentrations of tanks, air forces, and hospitals—and that it expected “with certainty” a major attack towards Loos. It warned Prince Rupprecht that it could spare no more forces for strengthening the front at Ypres, and so threw on him the sole responsibility if disaster followed through his taking away more of its artillery. But with his wider view as commander of the whole north-western front<sup>28</sup> he was not deceived. An offensive at Ypres, he wrote, was certain; the British had not the strength for two major strokes; the threat at Lens must therefore be a feint, to hold the German artillery in that sector.

At this stage Ludendorff suggested that the best way of preparing for the coming offensive might be to withdraw, on the eve of the attack, to more rearward lines,<sup>29</sup> and so to force the British to waste time by again advancing their artillery. The proposal was put to the army commanders, and the Sixth Army at once took this step along that part of the front which it believed to be threatened. But, as Haig had foreseen, the Fourth German Army in Flanders could not fall back without endangering the Belgian coast. It decided that its line of resistance must be in the rear elements of its first line.

By July 6 Prince Rupprecht recorded that he had now ample troops and ammunition to meet the coming offensive. The two corps holding his Ypres and Dixmude sectors—precisely those threatened by Haig’s intended main blow towards Roulers and Thourout—had been disposed in great depth. Each regiment of the front-line divisions had its three battalions behind one another, in line, support, and reserve; and behind these in each sector lay a third of the “counter-attack division,” with its remaining two-thirds still further back. The Germans were accurately informed even of the tactics approved by the Paris conference on May 4—a succession of limited advances; and at the last moment the ascertained bringing-up of British cavalry was rightly interpreted by Prince Rupprecht as showing that Haig was departing from that method and contemplating an early break-through. The front of the whole operation was exactly determined. By July 9 the German artillery (which, Prince Rupprecht notes, was then actually firing more than the British) was constantly blowing up dumps of British ammunition, and almost the only thing that puzzled the German leaders was why the British artillery did not begin its bombardment.<sup>30</sup>

No offensive—even including Nivelle’s—on the Western Front was ever so clearly heralded or so confidently awaited. Had it not been for threats on other fronts, the Germans would certainly not have been content to sit idly watching while Haig perfected his deliberate arrangements. On July 11 a proposal of Prince Rupprecht, to strike into the south of the Ypres salient and disorganise the preparations of the British artillery, was rejected by Ludendorff, who could not furnish the necessary reinforcements. But a highly effective blow, delivered the previous day by the Germans on the coast, shows what the German command would have attempted, had force been available.

<sup>28</sup> His group then comprised the Fourth, Sixth, and Second Armies.

<sup>29</sup> As had been suggested, but not done, before Messines.

<sup>30</sup> The German command was, however, wrong in one of its anticipations, that the British would violate Dutch neutrality, landing on the coast of Holland, or at least seizing the island of Walcheren. Throughout the offensive, two German infantry divisions and one of cavalry were held in readiness against this attack. (Gen. von Kuhl, *Der Weltkrieg 1914-18*, Vol. II, p. 116.)

On July 10th, on the coast, the Germans unexpectedly attacked General Rawlinson's army and drove it out of the greater part of its bridge-head across the Yser—a position from which a large portion of its force in the coastal attack was to have been launched. The 2nd Australian Tunnelling Company played an important part in that area, and the incident is therefore fully described in an appendix.<sup>31</sup> It caused a setback to the good prospects of Rawlinson's plan, but still left part of the bridge-head in British hands. He merely found it necessary to modify the project; and as, from the first, this had been entirely subsidiary, the scheme for the main Ypres attack was not affected.

The great bombardment at Ypres began on July 15th. On the Fifth Army's front the British guns stood thicker than ever before, one to every 6 yards as against one to every 7 at Messines. On the left the French had their artillery even denser, roughly one piece to every  $2\frac{1}{2}$  yards of a 2,600 yards front. The British guns for the attack comprised 2,092 of field artillery, 718 medium artillery, and 281 heavy artillery, 3,091 in all.<sup>32</sup> The weight of ammunition thrown in the last ten days of the bombardment on each yard of the Fifth Army's front did not quite reach the corresponding figure for the Messines bombardment, being  $4\frac{3}{4}$  tons per yard against  $5\frac{1}{2}$  tons; but the preparation was carried out on the same system, the suppression of the German artillery being considered all-important, and reserved for the last stage so as to catch the German batteries in their final positions.<sup>33</sup> During the bombardment it was

**The Ypres  
bombardment**

<sup>31</sup> *Appendix No 2, pp 960-4.*

<sup>32</sup> The growth of the British artillery is evidenced by the number of guns employed on the first day of successive offensives

	Somme. (4th Army)	Arras & Vimy. (1st & 3rd Armies)	Messines. (2nd Army)	Third Ypres (2nd & 5th Armies)
Field arty ..	1,254	1,890	1,510	2,092
Medium arty. ..	284	680	570	718
Heavy arty. ..	143	309	258	281
Totals ..	1,681	2,879	2,338	3,091

<sup>33</sup> The First French Army, on the other hand, took its counter-battery work first, then demolition of defences, and finally the immediate preparation for the attack, the imminence of this, however, being carefully screened.

suspected that the Germans had moved back their artillery.<sup>84</sup> Moreover shooting was hampered by the Flemish haze, and army commanders—especially General Anthoine—asked for more time.

Haig was loth to grant this; records of past years made it practically certain that rain would come early in August. But thoroughness of preparation was the first essential, and reluctantly he agreed to postpone the attack until the 28th. Difficulty of observation, however, continued. General Anthoine was impressed by the fact that his artillery had destroyed only 40 or 50 of the 120 German gun-emplacements on its front.<sup>85</sup> Adhering to Pétain's principle—not to attack without certainty of success—he begged for three more days. Doubts still existed whether the British preparation was complete, and Haig therefore postponed the attack until July 31st.

Despite General Anthoine's doubts, the first twelve days' bombardment had overwhelming effect on at least part of the German garrison. In case the Germans might prematurely withdraw, both British and French constantly probed the front, and on July 23rd and 25th French artillery officers found that they could walk over parts of the German lines almost unhindered—three of them brought in 19 prisoners. On the 27th both the French and the left flank of Gough's army found the opposing trenches deserted. In the area of the 49th German Reserve Division they were able to advance 600–800 yards and even to cross the Yser Canal.<sup>86</sup> A difficult obstacle in front of the left of the attack was thus passed.<sup>87</sup> On the German side the 49th Reserve Division was ordered to wipe the stain from its record by recapturing its lines, but the French and British barrage was so effective that the Allies were barely aware that any counter-attack had been attempted.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>84</sup> Inquiry at the *Reichsarchiv* has shown that there could be found no record of such withdrawal either at Messines before June 7, or at Ypres before July 31.

<sup>85</sup> The German batteries would not disclose themselves. Capitaine Delvert (*Les Opérations de la 1re Armée dans les Flandres*) says that, on July 25, to 75,000 French shells the German artillery replied with 4,000.

<sup>86</sup> Joining the Yser, 10 miles north-west of Ypres, with the Lys at Comines, 8 miles south-east of Ypres.

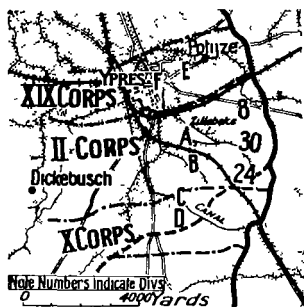
<sup>87</sup> On the British front the discovery seems to have been made by airmen. During the night of the 27th the British threw 17 bridges across the canal.

<sup>88</sup> How inaccurate even fairly written history can be, is shown by the statement in the German official monograph (*Flandern 1917*), that the British, after being repulsed in "stubborn fighting" on the 27th, broke suddenly into the front of the 49th Reserve Division, and occupied it against weak resistance. The counter-attack was attempted by parts of the 49th and 23rd Reserve Divisions.

**The Australian Artillery**

Although the British artillery in the salient eventually dominated the German, which it outnumbered by two—if not three—to one, much of it had to fire from almost naked positions on the Ypres flats, and its sufferings were, in general, beyond any in its previous experience. "On no previous occasion," says Haig's despatch, ". . . . had the whole ground from which we had to attack been so completely exposed to the enemy's observation." On to these flats had to be crowded the batteries not only of the attack, support, and reserve divisions, and most of the "army" brigades of the B.E.F., but even those of the Australian divisions then resting on the Somme (but under orders to move to Flanders), and of the 4th Australian Division then holding a quiet part of the Second Army's front south of Messines. From the German records it is abundantly clear that these movements were anxiously followed and carefully registered by the enemy's observers, especially the thrusting forth of batteries across the Ypres-Comines Canal to the area of Zillebeke Lake.

It so happened that this was the area into which part of the Australian artillery was brought. Leaving the Somme on July 8th and 9th, the artilleries (now two brigades each) of the 1st, 2nd, and 5th Australian Divisions after a week's march reached the bleak village of Dickebusch, three miles south-west of Ypres. In the muddy fields around this cluster of poor cottages they placed their waggon-lines. But the batteries marched out almost immediately under the orders of several of the Fifth Army's southern divisions, to which their brigades had been allotted (as shown in the marginal sketch), and to which their heavy and medium trench-mortar batteries had already gone. The 4th Division's artillery had already been sent from II Anzac to the northern flank of the Second Army at the



- A—1st A.F.A. Bde.  
 B—2nd A.F.A. Bde.  
 C—2nd Div. Arty.  
 D—4th Div. Arty.  
 E—13th A.F.A. Bde.  
 F—14th A.F.A. Bde.

Ypres-Comines Canal, and therefore was close to the others.<sup>39</sup>

The preliminary bombardment had begun before the Australian artillery from the Somme arrived, and the brigades went straight from rest into the feverish tension preceding the battle. From the moment when the batteries of the 1st Division moved to their gun-pits near Zillebeke, it became evident that they were confronted by experiences more severe than any they had met. One of the main differences between the conditions of "Third Ypres" and those previously experienced on the Somme was that, whereas at the Somme the German artillery fire lay perhaps more heavily on the forward area, at Ypres it thrashed the roads, bivouacs, and battery positions for miles back. It was no longer blinded by the complete suppression of its airmen. The British airmen were usually able to drive most of their opponents from the vital sectors during certain vital hours, but on numerous occasions during this battle the German air force, though its tactics were less daring, held the upper hand.

The result was that, if troops in the front areas suffered less from German bombardment than at the battle of the Somme, those in rear suffered more; even casualty clearing stations far in rear were shelled,<sup>40</sup> and the battery nests

<sup>39</sup> See *Vol. XII, plate 350*. The southern corps (II) of the Fifth Army had three divisions in line, 24th, 18th (on July 24 relieved by the 30th), and 8th. The 2nd Division's artillery went on the night of July 22 to the southernmost division, the 24th, and formed a field artillery group with headquarters at the Spoil Bank and most of the batteries just south of the canal. The 1st Division's artillery formed a group for the centre division, the 18th, taking up position on the night of July 19, the 1st Brigade along the southern edge of Zillebeke Lake (but with the 101st How. Bty. detached to the 73rd H.A.G. for counter-battery work), and the 2nd a quarter of a mile to the south-west. The 5th Division's artillery was allotted to the southernmost division (15th, Scottish) of the next corps on the north, the XIX. The 14th Brigade took position in the northern edge of Ypres, and, with the artillery of the 16th British Division, formed the left group of the 15th Division's artillery. The 13th Brigade was thrust 1,000 yards forward from the Menin Gate along the Potijze road. Except the 113th How. Bty., it remained silent for the present, but formed, with the 15th Division's own artillery, the right divisional group. The 4th Aust. Division's artillery was not detached from its own army (the Second), but had been sent round on July 11 to support the 47th Division (X Corps) on the left of the Second Army. The 10th Brigade and part of the 11th formed the "Canal Group"; the rest of the 11th formed part of the "Oosthoek Group." Among the heavy batteries supporting the X Corps was the 55th (Australian) at Vierstraat (see *Vol. XII, plate 351*). Part of the Australian motor transport also was working in this area and further north. The trench-mortar batteries did not in all cases go to the same divisions as their artillery. Thus, those of the 1st Division went to the 8th British Division, and the medium trench-mortars of the 5th Division to the 55th Division.

<sup>40</sup> No. 3 Aust. C.C.S., placed by Fifth Army at Brandhoek, a mile behind Vlamertinghe, was bombed on August 16, an officer and one man being killed, and on the 21st the Germans began to shell it. The nurses refused to leave, and some wept when ordered to safe quarters. The tents were protected by low fences of sandbags, but seven were blown to ribbons. Patients had to be cleared to No. 10 British C.C.S., and the hospital closed.





31 THE POSITION TAKEN UP BY THE 1ST AUSTRALIAN DIVISION'S ARTILLERY ON JULY 31ST  
NEAR "ZOUAVE WOOD"

The view is towards "Stirling Castle". In the foreground is the point at which a team of the 101st Howitzer Battery was hit by a shell

*Aust War Memorial Official Photo No E4531  
Taken on 18th August, 1917*



32. HEADQUARTERS' DUGOUT OF THE 105TH HOWITZER BATTERY AT HILL 60, 27TH AUGUST, 1917  
The officers, from left to right, are Captain L R Blake, Lieutenant D. B B Ikin, and  
Major H. N. Morris (battery commander).

*Aust War Memorial Official Photo No E661.*

*To face p 705.*

at Zillebeke were one of the most important targets. The III Bavarian Corps, facing the British II Corps, had its artillery so organised as to be able to concentrate a "crash" bombardment on any point opposite the key position—the southern end of the main semicircular ridge—for which it was responsible. This fact is noted both in the British and German records, and the Bavarian official history states that this organisation was employed

on several occasions during the preliminary duels to knock out or drive back the British batteries which had crossed the Yser Canal and ventured forward to the neighbourhood of Zillebeke.

The impact of those bombardments on the 1st Australian Division's batteries was described by a British artillery officer at the time:<sup>41</sup>

We were next to the Anzacs, splendid fellows. I remember looking back—we knew where they were, of course, south of Zillebeke Lake, and we were just north—and seeing the Boche fairly pounding it in there; and all the time the Anzac guns kept on firing away, and we wondered how they could do it—how on earth they weren't blown to blazes. Right in the thick of it you would see them firing every time. Then we moved up and we came alongside some of them again further up, and I was telling one of them what we saw and how splendid we thought it was; and he said: "Do you know, we were looking across at your chaps north of the lake and thinking just the same thing about them!"

But this activity was only maintained at the cost of casualties such as Australian artillery had never before suffered, even in Noreuil valley. On the first day at the position of the 1st Battery beside the lake, Captain Aspinall,<sup>42</sup> medical officer to the 1st Brigade, was killed and several men were wounded. On the following day, when the 3rd Battery, close by, was being registered upon its targets by its commander, Major Kingsmill,<sup>43</sup> and Lieutenant East,<sup>44</sup> the German artillery opened with shrapnel and high-explosive upon the firing guns. The battery positions were lost to view in dust and smoke. Lieutenant Parker<sup>45</sup> and 6 others were killed, and

<sup>41</sup> In a conversation recorded in a diary.

<sup>42</sup> Capt. W. R. Aspinall, M.C.; A.A.M.C. Medical practitioner; of Sydney; b. Lady Robinson's Beach, Sydney, 4 Jan., 1893. Killed in action, 20 July, 1917.

<sup>43</sup> Major H. F. Kingsmill, D.S.O.; 3rd Bty., A.F.A. Bank official; of Sydney; b. Gunnedah, N.S.W., 31 Dec., 1888. Killed in action, 8 Aug., 1917.

<sup>44</sup> Capt. W. H. East, M.C.; 3rd Bty., A.F.A. Y.M.C.A. secretary and school teacher, of Rochester, Vic.; b. Diggara, Rochester, 16 Aug., 1887. Killed in action, 5 Oct., 1917.

<sup>45</sup> Lieut. A. Parker, 3rd Bty., A.F.A. Bank official; of Brisbane; b. Toowong, Q'land, 25 July, 1880. Died of wounds, 21 July, 1917. He was originally a medical orderly at Anzac, but when two gun crews of the 7th Battery were destroyed he asked to be taken on as a gunner.

Lieutenant King<sup>46</sup> and 8 others wounded. The 101st Howitzer Battery, also beside the lake, had 3 men killed and 7 wounded. The enemy turned upon the batteries of the 2nd Brigade, south of the railway leading to Hill 60, and Lieutenants McMullin<sup>47</sup> and Bugby<sup>48</sup> and several others were wounded. Next day the enemy bombarded the battery dugouts along the railway, and killed Major Kirkland,<sup>49</sup> medical officer of the 2nd Brigade, and Lieutenant Bumpus,<sup>50</sup> and wounded the commander of the 6th Battery, Major Dodd, and a number of men. Rumours of these casualties reached I Anzac Headquarters, then moving up to Flanders, and it was realised that, if such loss continued, reinforcements would have to be raised for the artillery on a scale similar to that for the infantry.

In spite of this punishment the 1st Division's artillery carried out in full its elaborate programme of bombardment. With the exception of the 4th Battery, which early had four guns put out of action, each battery fired on most days 300 rounds about "Stirling Castle" in the first German line on the ridge, and about "Inverness Copse" and "Glencorse Wood"<sup>51</sup> in the second line, and 360 rounds each night to catch the German ration parties and reliefs on known tracks behind those lines, and at trench junctions. On the 25th an aeroplane tried to register the batteries on their barrage lines, but heavy rain prevented this, and the group's wireless station was also damaged by shell-fire. On the 26th in addition to their programme the guns covered a raid by the 30th Division.<sup>52</sup> The artilleries of the 2nd, 4th, and 5th Australian Divisions were doing similar work but with less opposition, though all were shelled with the new "mustard" gas and suffered steady

<sup>46</sup> Capt. D. B. A. King, M.C.; 3rd Bty., A F A Clerk; of Kew, Vic.; b. Albury, N.S.W., 11 Jan., 1895.

<sup>47</sup> Lieut.-Col. A. O. McMullin, M.C.; 2nd A.F.A. Bde. Grazier; of Upper Rouchel, N.S.W.; b. St. Rubins, Scone, N.S.W., 29 April, 1885.

<sup>48</sup> Lieut. F. E. C. Bugby, 2nd A.F.A. Bde. Mercantile marine officer, of North Sydney, b. Sherborne, Dorset, Eng., 2 Nov., 1892. Died 21 June, 1920.

<sup>49</sup> Major W. D. Kirkland, M.C.; A A M C. Medical practitioner; of Lithgow, N.S.W., b. Bathurst, N.S.W., 8 March, 1891. Killed in action, 22 July, 1917.

<sup>50</sup> Lieut. L. R. Bumpus, 6th Bty., A.F.A. Stock broker's clerk; of Brisbane; b. New Wanstead, Essex, England, 1883. Killed in action, 22 July, 1917.

<sup>51</sup> Photographs of Stirling Castle, Glencorse Wood, and Inverness Copse, taken two months later, are shown in *Vol XII (plates 366, 368, 370)*.

<sup>52</sup> A German officer and 8 men were captured in this raid. Two raids of the 15th (Scottish) Division, covered by practice barrages in which the 5th Division's artillery took part, were exceedingly successful. At 2 p.m. on July 24 two companies of the 12th Highland Light Infantry captured 80 Germans (including two officers). On July 28 the 7th Cameron Highlanders captured 61 (including an officer). These prisoners were of great value for purposes of information.

casualties, the 4th Division's artillery losing 4 officers and 117 others in three weeks before the battle.<sup>53</sup> About half the Australian trench-mortar batteries assisted in the bombardment of the German wire and trenches; many of the detachments not so employed and some parties from the ammunition columns helped to dig battle positions for the artillery.

On the 28th, after several postponements, the counter-battery bombardment began. From now on the enemy was to be given no rest, and no chance of getting up ammunition, supplies, or reliefs without considerable loss. For three days and nights the howitzers, heavy and light, pounded the known German batteries, while the eighteen-pounders sprinkled the enemy's forward battery areas with shrapnel or, by night, drenched them with gas. The last night's work was particularly severe. In the 2nd Division's artillery, for example, all batteries opened with gas at midnight and continued steadily till 3.50, when all guns on the battlefield passed to the continuous twelve hours' task of covering the attack, and to the many calls certain to be made on them later. It was recognised that this must greatly strain the endurance of both artillerymen and guns.

When we ceased firing (wrote Acting Bombardier Hannaker,<sup>54</sup> of the 5th Division, afterwards), the guns were so hot you could have boiled water on them.

Many who watched have described that opening barrage, and the responding German flares—probably the most wonderful display of fireworks that was ever seen.<sup>55</sup> Early in the day the infantry whom the 2nd, 1st, and 5th Division's artilleries were supporting were reported to have reached the second German

<sup>53</sup> In the 2nd Divisional Artillery the 10th Battery, which was thrust across the canal to La Chapelle, within half-a-mile of some of the 1st Division's batteries, had three guns hit. On July 25 Captain R. M. Thompson (a Duntroon graduate, of Glebe Point, N.S.W.) took round a roving gun and registered all targets for this group. The 5th Division's artillery at Ypres had some difficulty in getting its forward guns (13th Brigade) into position beyond the Menin Gate. As with all the artillery of the 15th Division, two guns of each battery went through Ypres to their battle positions on the night of July 19-20, two on the 20-21st, and two on the 21-22nd. The 113th Howitzer Battery was held up each night by the shelling of the roads through which the traffic slowly wound in a continuous column. After this battery was established its ammunition was blown up, and it eventually moved into the roadside ruins south-west of Potijze.

<sup>54</sup> Gnr. (actg. Bdr.) R. E. Hannaker (No. 14626; 13th A.F.A. Bde.). Clerk: of South Melbourne; b. Richmond, Vic., 1898. Died of wounds, 16 Nov., 1917.

<sup>55</sup> The official British title of the offensive is "The Battles of Ypres, 1917," and of this phase of it (July 31-August 2) the "Battle of Pilkem Ridge."

line, and all these batteries had to go forward. Those of the 2nd Division crossed the canal<sup>56</sup> and, after moving at the trot—there were strict orders against spectacular galloping—the leading batteries opened fire again according to programme, from their new positions north of Hill 60, within 46 minutes, having suffered only slight loss.

The brigades of the 1st Division (supporting the 30th Division) advanced at the hour laid down, 6 a.m.<sup>57</sup> Captain Glendinning<sup>58</sup> had reconnoitred a route, and Major Byrne,<sup>59</sup> a spare battery commander of the 1st Brigade, having left Dickebusch with the teams shortly after midnight, now led the column, 4th, 5th, 6th, 3rd, 1st, 2nd, 102nd Batteries, in that order, across the battlefield. Pack-horses, seven pairs<sup>60</sup> for each gun, followed the battery limbers, so that each piece would have 108 rounds on going into action. At the forward position—a depression 1,000 yards south of Hooge—Lieutenant-Colonel Stevenson (2nd Brigade)<sup>61</sup> and Major Kingsmill (3rd Battery) were anxiously looking at their watches, which showed the precise hour for the column's arrival, when over the gentle slope behind them came the 4th Battery quietly leading the march to the point of divergence. The whole battlefield was sprinkled with bodies of infantry moving up for later stages of the attack, prisoners trailing back, mules going forward with signboards, and tanks sliding along the tracks, while above, under a low ceiling of dull cloud, aeroplanes wheeled so thickly that the pilots had constantly to avoid collision.

The front of battle should then have been a mile and a half ahead, but machine-gun bullets were whistling about, coming from the south-east,<sup>62</sup> and, as the batteries diverged

<sup>56</sup> Except the 10th Battery, which was already beyond it.

<sup>57</sup> Lieut.-Colonel S. M. Anderson (1st Brigade), commanding the group, had protested against the guns being ordered forward at programme time, irrespective of the infantry's progress; but word had by then arrived that "Shrewsbury Forest" had been captured.

<sup>58</sup> Capt. A. J. Glendinning, 2nd A.F.A. Bde. University student; of Brunswick, Vic.; b. North Fitzroy, Vic., 20 Aug., 1894. Killed in action, 2 Aug., 1917.

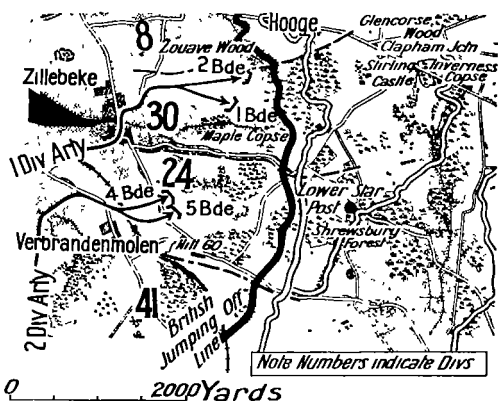
<sup>59</sup> Major H. R. Byrne, D.S.O., V.D.; 1st Div. Arty. Manufacturer's agent; of Malvern, Vic.; b. Melbourne, 28 Oct., 1888. (Major Byrne had constantly gone over the route, and had taken the battery captains over it.)

<sup>60</sup> The ridden horse carried 4 rounds and the led horse 8.

<sup>61</sup> As with most field artillery groups, the brigade commanders took turn about to command the group and so obtained some rest, but this day both were in action, Lieutenant-Colonel S. M. Anderson (1st Brigade) commanding the group.

<sup>62</sup> They came from the direction of "Lower Star Post" in Shrewsbury Forest, where the Germans still held out in the first objective, and from which the slope south of Hooge was visible.

to take up their stations, the depression was bombarded in a manner which suggested that they had been seen. Under this fire the batteries took up their positions. At 8.37 the 4th reported itself ready to shoot. At 9 its telephone was connected, and the six other batteries were connecting theirs. The last



gun but one in the column, a howitzer of the 102nd Battery, had become bogged; the last gun-team, while waiting for it to be extricated, was shattered by a 5.9-inch shell, and these two howitzers had temporarily to be left where they were, but all the remainder were in position. A German airman immediately bombed them, but without effect. Major Olding (2nd Battery) and Captain Doherty<sup>63</sup> (102nd) had been wounded by machine-gun fire. At 9 o'clock the signal officer, Lieutenant Walker,<sup>64</sup> was killed connecting the telephone lines to the forward exchange at Stirling Castle. At 9.30 Captain MacDonald,<sup>65</sup> 6th Battery, was killed by a shell. By noon two other officers of that battery had been hit<sup>66</sup> and Lieutenant Simson<sup>67</sup> killed. During the day the two brigades had 16 officers and 137 men hit.

But the long programme was carried out to the letter. Early in the afternoon it was learnt that the II Corps had not succeeded as had been hoped. The difficult going, especially in the wreckage of the old woods, had slowed the pace. The infantry had lost the barrage and was held up by machine-guns

<sup>63</sup> Major J. Doherty, M.C.; 7th A.F.A. Bde. Company manager; of Balmain and Darling Point, N.S.W.; b. Balmain, 6 March, 1888. Died of illness, 26 Feb., 1919.

<sup>64</sup> Lieut. A. Walker, 1st Div. Sig. Coy. Electrician; of Fitzroy, Vic.; b. Fitzroy, 1895. Killed in action, 31 July, 1917.

<sup>65</sup> Capt. J. S. R. MacDonald, 6th Bty., A.F.A. Bank clerk, of Brisbane, b. Herberton, Q'land, 8 Nov., 1894. Killed in action, 31 July, 1917.

<sup>66</sup> Lieutenants A. F. Dingwall (of Toowoomba, Q'land) and C. Groves (of Roma, Q'land).

<sup>67</sup> Lieut. J. Simson, 6th Bty., A.F.A. Pastoralist, of Quirindi, N.S.W., b. Toorak, Vic., 13 June, 1891. Killed in action, 31 July, 1917.

in the opening between Glencorse Wood and Inverness Copse. The second German line had not been taken; the troops for the second phase could make little headway, and thus since 9.20 the barrage, steadily moving ahead, had been mere waste of ammunition. Important intermediate positions—"Clapham Junction"<sup>68</sup> and "Stirling Castle"—on the heights a mile ahead of the guns were indeed held, but the batteries were much too far forward for useful employment. German airmen shot one or two of the artillerymen. At 4 o'clock rain, which all day had been threatening, began to fall steadily, and at 5 came orders from the 30th Division to withdraw the breech-blocks and sights, and bring back the men for a night's rest, leaving the guns ready to support any further advance ordered in the near future.<sup>69</sup>

Further north, on the lower land, the Fifth Army had much better success. The 5th Australian Divisional Artillery supporting the 15th Division learnt at 6 a.m. that the German second line was taken. Each rearward artillery brigade (including the 14th Australian) then sent forward its batteries, one at a time, to the old front-line area at "Cambridge Road," north of the Ypres-Roulers railway, while the forward brigades (including the 13th) detached single guns to follow the Scottish infantry to the German second line. The front-line area was viciously shelled, and the parties making a track, by which the guns might cross the old No-Man's Land, were delayed. Lieutenant Bennet<sup>70</sup> (51st Battery), unable to get his gun across, reconnoitred a route and at 11.36 came into action. Cambridge



<sup>68</sup> For a photograph of this position taken two months later, see Vol XII, plate 363.

<sup>69</sup> The report of the 30th Division states: "The cutting of the German wire was efficiently carried out. . . . The work of the artillery was beyond praise and all tasks allotted were efficiently carried out. The conditions under which the artillery were working could hardly have been worse, battery positions were heavily shelled both by day and by night, and the casualties . . . were severe. In no cases was it possible to provide adequate shelter for battery personnel. . . . Rest at night was usually impossible owing to hostile gas shelling. . . . The supply of ammunition proved extraordinarily difficult."

<sup>70</sup> Lieut R. A. Bennet, MC; 51st Bty, AFA Electrician, of Korumburra, Vic; b Avenel. Vic., 1889. Killed in action, 4 Oct., 1917.



Road also was strongly shelled. Lieutenants Wilshire<sup>71</sup> and Gammon,<sup>72</sup> both on the way forward to observe, and Lieutenants Reid<sup>73</sup> (signalling officer) and Barron<sup>74</sup> were killed, and Major Crespin,<sup>75</sup> commanding the 53rd Battery, and several others wounded.

In this sector, as further north, the infantry reached the third German line; but their right was fired into by machine-guns in the ground not taken by the II Corps, and the Scots had to fall back to the second line. At the same time came the rain. Lieutenant Bennet was ordered to withdraw his gun, but, after three attempts, he was forced to leave it, and came back with only two of his detachment unwounded.<sup>76</sup>

In the rest of the main operation practically no Australians, with the exception of airmen,<sup>77</sup> were engaged, and vast though the effort was, no detail can be given here. It must suffice to say that, north of the sectors dealt with in the preceding pages, the third German line was captured and held, and the extreme left of the Fifth Army, and the two French divisions beside it, advanced a little beyond that line.

Thus, at nightfall of the great day, the left and centre of Haig's troops maintained a position in or beyond the third objective; the right centre was in the second objective; and

<sup>71</sup> Lieut. S. H. O. Wilshire, 113th How. Bty. Bank clerk; of Deniliquin, N.S.W.; b. Deniliquin, 18 June, 1890. Killed in action, 31 July, 1917.

<sup>72</sup> Lieut R. T. Gammon, M.M.; 14th A.F.A. Bde. Ostrich and sheep farmer, of Deniliquin, N.S.W.; b. Portobello, West Edinburgh, Scotland, 1883. Killed in action, 31 July, 1917.

<sup>73</sup> Lieut R. J. Reid, 5th Div Sig. Coy. Electrician; of Paddington, N.S.W.; b. Paddington, 1894. Killed in action, 31 July, 1917.

<sup>74</sup> Lieut. J. Barron, 53rd Bty., A.F.A. Labourer; of Sydney; b. Stanningley, Yorks, Eng., 1882. Killed in action, 31 July, 1917.

<sup>75</sup> Major G. J. Crespin, 53rd Bty., A.F.A. Barrister and solicitor, of Kew, Vic.; b. Melbourne, 3 Nov., 1874. Died 26 May, 1924.

<sup>76</sup> He returned and brought it out on August 2.

<sup>77</sup> A number of Australian airmen took part in these operations, some as members of the R.F.C., others belonging to the A.F.C. but temporarily attached for experience to British squadrons, especially the 29th and 32nd (*see Vol. VIII, p. 177*). Of the Australian members of these squadrons, Captain A. S. Shepherd, "after doing many splendid things," was killed "going straight for twelve Germans"; Lieut. P. E. Palmer also was killed, and Lieut. A. B. Hill was among the missing. Lieut. H. J. Edwards (R.F.C.), Capt. R. C. Philipps, and Lieuts. G. A. Wells and G. C. Wilson carried out "ground-strafting" for the attacking infantry, dangerous work, making it necessary to fly under the arch made by the crossing of the British and German barrages. There is a note among the records that Brigadier-General P. W. Game, Chief of Staff of the Royal Flying Corps in France, told Major S. S. Butler of the 1 Anzac Corps staff that, in his opinion, no other airmen in the British service were "quite so useful as the Australian." It was their self-reliance that made them so valuable. General Trenchard, on the other hand, considered the Canadians best (*see Vol. III, footnote on p. 183*). (Shepherd and Palmer belonged to Petersham, N.S.W.; Hill to Warren, N.S.W.; Edwards to St. Arnaud, Vic.; Philipps to Perth and Wyndham, W. Aust.; Wells to Seacombe, Vic.; Wilson, who was accidentally killed on 11 March, 1929, to Newcastle, N.S.W.)

the right in the first. Behind them the steady pelt of the rain flickered with the blurred flashes of the guns desperately trying to keep back from their weary infantry the inevitable German counter-attacks.

On the right, Plumer's Second Army carried out that day its feint north-west of Lille, and it was only in this and in the corresponding feint at Lens that dominion infantry took part. Since Messines the several corps of the Second Army had tried to get within striking distance of the Warneton Line. This effort was afterwards regarded—at least by the 11th Australian Brigade, engaged in it for a famous "eighteen days"—as having been much more difficult than the attack subsequently delivered. Incidentally, it was during this uncomfortable time<sup>78</sup> that a chance salvo, fired at a usually safe track behind

<sup>78</sup> The work of establishing the 3rd Division's front deserves to be recorded in detail. Opposite the Second Army the Germans had been holding almost the same position on which they had fallen back on June 10 after the Battle of Messines. They had kept their main strength behind the Ypres-Commines Canal and the Lys, but maintained their front-line battalions in the Warneton Line west of these waterways. In front of this again they had kept a strong fringe of outposts in shell-holes.

In the second half of June the IX Corps line was still at Gapaard, Delporte, Joye, and Van Hove Farms, but in the 11 Anzac sector the 25th British Division had advanced to within 500-900 yards of the Warneton Line, and the New Zealanders further south had almost reached La Basse Ville and the Lys. The 4th Australian Division, coming back into the line on June 27, after a rest, worked on the new trench- and outpost-system partly established by the New Zealanders. The extra (4th) N.Z. infantry brigade remained holding the quiet line near the Lys south of Warneton under command of the 4th Australian Division. For the 4th Division also this three weeks' tour was an uncomfortable one, some of the outposts being difficult to reach and support, and a large proportion of the troops raw reinforcements. Posts of the 14th and 51st Battalions were raided and a few men of the 14th were captured.

The 3rd Australian Division, which on June 23 took over the 25th Division's sector between the Blauwepoortbeek and the Douve, found itself faced by a more difficult task. Through a mistake (due to the maps not showing the lines of trees) the 25th Division had sited its line too far back at Steignast Farm, and a new system had to be established along the whole divisional front except at the flanks. This task was begun on June 23, the 11th Brigade taking over work in the front line for a period ever afterwards known to its members as "The Eighteen Days." At the same time the other brigades established three other successive lines of defence, the last being the old "Black Line" of the Messines offensive.

The field artillery, of which all except two brigades for each division was now drawn out to rest, was ordered to refrain from provoking retaliation from the German guns, which probably, for the time being, were more numerous. The German air force also had a marked local superiority, shooting down British balloons, attacking working parties, and flying low over the front line. The 11th Brigade was ordered not to let the Germans



Hill 63, mortally wounded one of the most eminent of Australian citizen-soldiers, the commander of the 4th Division, Major-General W. Holmes.<sup>79</sup>

establish outposts in front of the Warneton Line, and General Cannan informed his battalions that, if they failed to prevent this, they themselves would have to undertake the minor operations for clearing the posts out. Keen patrolling and several encounters, however, proved that the German posts were already there, especially strong resistance coming from a windmill on a low ridge running obliquely across the front.

For the creation of a new trench-system, the 11th Brigade was an exceptionally effective body. This was due to the excellent *liaison* existing between the 11th Field Company under Major R. J. Donaldson (Broken Hill, N.S.W.), the infantry, and the pioneers. In this 18-day tour, working parties, everywhere under the direction of two or three experts, transformed the forward system. Posts were pushed out, a new advanced front line was dug; a series of bays, with fire-steps and traverses, was made immediately in advance of the old front line, which then became a traffic trench behind them. Six cross-trenches were made between the front and support lines. Wells were sunk, and headquarters for companies and battalions were constructed or improved. The battalion headquarters were in the old German concrete dugouts around which the fiercest fighting had taken place in the afternoon phase of the Battle of Messines.

But the enemy saw clearly on air-photographs the rapid extension of the works, and the tracks of the working parties that nightly streamed over the ridge. In addition, he enjoyed the daily spectacle of roaming Australians, who would not use the muddy communication trenches, some of which, indeed, were impassable, while one, "Pine Avenue," ran without traverses straight towards the enemy, and was universally avoided. The German artillery, machine-gunners, and snipers were kept busy, and the 43rd Battalion alone is said to have lost over 300 men in this tour.

The headquarters' blockhouses, being obviously centres of traffic, were constantly bombarded. The staffs usually took their meals in light shelters near by, and on July 6 a shell, bursting in the mess of the 41st Battalion, put out of action its commander, Lieut.-Colonel F. J. Board (Lismore, N.S.W.), and his staff, Captain H. Chumleigh (Adelaide; died 22 Aug., 1930), adjutant, Lieut. F. W. MacGibbon (Brisbane), intelligence officer, and Lieut. G. S. Dodds (Sandgate, Q'land; died of wounds, 29 Sept., 1918), together with Major W. J. Kinnish (Norwood, S. Aust.) of the 43rd, were wounded, and Lieut. A. J. Edmonston-Fearn (St. Kilda, Vic.), *liaison* officer from the artillery, was killed. Major A. R. Heron (Bowen, Q'land) of the 42nd was sent for to command the 41st. The same day, as the staff at 4th Brigade Headquarters was sitting down to dinner, a 5.9-inch shell burst among them, killing Lieut. G. W. Markham Mills (Parramatta, N.S.W.), the intelligence officer, and wounding Brigadier-General C. H. Brand, his brigade-major, Major C. M. Johnston (Glenhuntly, Vic.), the acting staff-captain, Captain H. Thomson (Adelaide), and the signalling officer, Lieut. W. Beazley (Perth, W. Aust.).

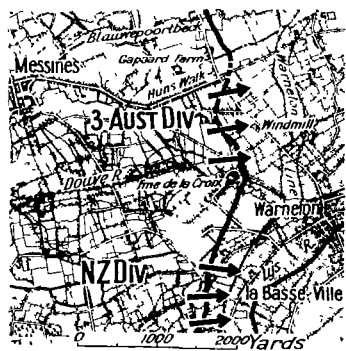
Not unnaturally, the local German garrison met the threat implied in the Australian activity by strengthening its own posts. Patrols of the 11th Brigade, and of the 9th which succeeded it, found signs that these posts were being linked by a continuous trench. The enemy's position along the Windmill ridge shut out from the Australians the view of the Warneton Line. Thus even the new front line in this sector was not a good one, and Cannan decided to thrust the German outposts from this ridge. His troops first tried to do so by small patrol-attacks on the night of July 3, but were repelled by two of the posts, and a patrol which captured a third post was driven out by a strong counter-attack, Lieut. E. McK. Stevenson (Burringbar, N.S.W.), 42nd Battalion, being badly wounded. The 42nd had 16 casualties this day, and the 43rd 25, mostly through the barrage called down by the Germans.

Cannan therefore suggested that his brigade should undertake the minor operation already foreshadowed. It was this operation that General Monash chose for the 3rd Division's feat for July 31.

<sup>79</sup> Holmes was taking the Premier of New South Wales, Hon. W. A. Holman, to survey the battlefield of Messines. In his own visits, Holmes used to take the straightest route, however dangerous, but on this occasion he had left his car at the "White Gates" to avoid a dangerous corner farther on. As the party started on foot, the salvo burst. Holmes alone was hit, through chest and lung. He was hurried by his A.D.C. (Capt. D. S. Maxwell) to the nearest medical assistance, but died while being carried to the dressing room at "Kandahar Farm."

By early July, despite much hard work and several small local actions, none of the Second Army's corps was close enough to the Warneton Line to allow of the feint's taking the form of an attack upon it. Even in front of II Anzac a line of German outposts intervened. On the front of the 3rd Australian Division, at Messines, some of these lay along a low ridge (really a branch of the Huns' Walk spur) which ran obliquely across the front south-east of Gapaard. Resistance was especially strong in certain posts near a windmill, and Brigadier-General Cannan, whose brigade (11th) held the line, proposed to clear them by a minor operation.

This proposal reached General Monash's headquarters precisely at the time when he was asked to suggest some minor action to serve as the 3rd Division's rôle in General Plumer's plan to feint against Lille. He at once put forward the operation proposed by Cannan, and this was approved. On the southern part of the II Anzac front the New Zealand Division<sup>80</sup> undertook for its part to capture La Basse Ville, a southern outlier of Warneton, and, further south, to dig advanced trenches to command the Lys crossings, in order to create the impression that the passage of the river might be intended. The La Basse Ville attack would be made two days



before the others. The feint by the IX and X Corps would take the shape of an assault on the German outpost-line. The feint would thus extend the front of battle to the Lys River. A few German posts on the flanks of the 3rd Division's attack would not be assaulted, but, to prevent them from interfering with the division's operation, they would be bombarded and the flanks screened with smoke. The edge of Warneton village, which lay close to both the Anzac objectives, would also be muffled in smoke.

<sup>80</sup> The 4th Aust. Division was then out of the line.

On July 11th, after its "eighteen days," the 11th Brigade went out to rest and to practise for the attack, the 9th Brigade relieving it and assisting its preparation by beginning to dig the ends of the continuous fire-trench and communication trenches. But, in doing so, the 9th found itself almost on top of the nearest cluster of posts which lay along a ditch and hedge on the far side of the Gapaard-Warneton road. As these endangered the work and were too close for the barrage, on July 16th and 21st attempts were made by parties to clear them, but without success.<sup>88</sup> Seeing



\* The attack on the 26th was to be made by the 34th Battalion after a bombardment by howitzers. As these failed to hit the posts, Lieutenant-Colonel E. E. Martin (Wellington District, N.S.W.) asked leave to postpone the enterprise. This request was refused, and parties under Lieutenant G. E. Hodges (Cessnock, N.S.W.) attacked. The ditch on the near side of the road was reached, but the Germans were ready and the parties were forced to retire with a loss of 4 killed, 8 wounded, and a Lewis gun lost. The attempt on the 21st was made by parties of the 36th Battalion, 120 in all, covered by artillery. Two posts were captured, but the Germans counter-attacked. Lieutenant F. J. Wilson (Auburn, N.S.W.) leading one party, was killed, and the 36th, driven from one post, had to retire from the other.

that the IX Corps had met with similar difficulties near Groenelinde Cabaret, three-quarters of a mile west of the Warneton Line, the army commander, General Plumer, himself now ordered that these "isolated" attacks should cease.

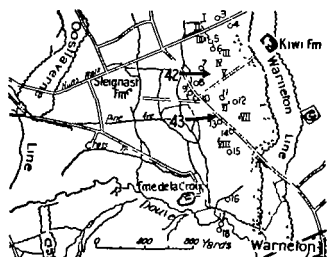
It is realised (wrote General Harington, Plumer's M.G.G.S.) that these attempts have been made from the highest motives and with great gallantry, but it is evident that the enemy intends to resist seriously at these points, and the army commander considers it will be much more satisfactory and less costly to deal with these places firstly by a concentration of artillery, and to capture them in the main attack. . . .

A few days later, when the New Zealand Division also failed in its early attack on La Basse Ville,<sup>84</sup> General Plumer informed General Godley that he did not wish the attempt to be repeated until the day of the main attack.

The army commander does not wish your units to incur further casualties in these isolated actions.<sup>85</sup>

Thus the attack by the New Zealanders on La Basse Ville also became part of the general offensive of July 31st. The feint and the main offensive began at the same hour, 3.50 a.m.<sup>86</sup>

The 3rd Division attacked with two battalions, the 43rd and 42nd, on a front of 1,300 yards. They were supposed to be faced by 12 German outposts, numbered, from the north, 3-14 (with others on the flanks); the posts which the Australians were to establish were numbered III-VIII.<sup>87</sup> The 11th Brigade, which had relieved the 9th on the previous day,<sup>88</sup> brought up its two attack-battalions in motor-buses to the old Messines front line and, despite the wretched condition of the communication trenches, assembled the



<sup>84</sup> On July 27. The 4th Division had been relieved on July 20.

<sup>85</sup> Plumer added that "to some extent at any rate" the impression of a threat against Lille must have been created.

<sup>86</sup> Except immediately north of 11 Anzac. For special reasons urged by the commander of the 37th Division, the right of that division was not to attack until four hours later.

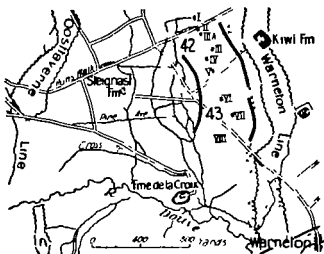
<sup>87</sup> I and 11 were established before the attack.

<sup>88</sup> The Germans had tried to raid the 9th Brigade at 9.40 a.m. on the 28th, both on the 36th Battalion's front near the Gapaard-Warneton road, and on that of the 35th near the Douve. They were driven off, leaving dead in No-Man's-Land. On the night of July 23 they had similarly failed in an attempt to raid the 37th Division, but the resulting German shell-fire caught some of the 9th Brigade's working parties.

troops in the support trench without any hitch, the existing garrison (41st) temporarily withdrawing to the second system.

The German posts were only 100 yards distant in the centre, and, when the advance began, the 42nd and 43rd were upon them almost immediately. The assault was met with bombs, and the company of the 43rd (South Australia) attacking there for a moment hesitated. But its commander, Lieutenant Tucker,<sup>89</sup> dashed forward. His men followed, and, though he was wounded, the posts along the ditch were taken. Lieutenant Dunstan<sup>90</sup> took Tucker's place. Sergeant Barraclough,<sup>91</sup> who succeeded Dunstan, seized the next post and was then himself wounded. In the platoon attacking a neighbouring post the subaltern and both sergeants were wounded, but Corporal McLaughlan<sup>92</sup> led on and captured it. Farther to the right at the defences around the mill<sup>93</sup> (Post 13) there was a sharp fight with bombs and rifles. Lieutenant Harrington,<sup>94</sup> and all officers and sergeants of the two platoons attacking here, were wounded, but, with Corporal Roberts<sup>95</sup> in charge, the mill was captured.

The left battalion (42nd, Queensland) also met opposition at posts 8 and 9, and at others on the left, but word quickly came back that the posts had been taken. Within a quarter of an hour the first wave had gone on, and was lying along the wire of the Warneton Line,<sup>96</sup> the second wave was digging posts III-VII,<sup>97</sup> and the third wave was busy upon the new fire-trench. The



<sup>89</sup> Lieut. F. G. Tucker, 43rd Bn. Farmer; of Toorak, S. Aust.; b. Norwood, S.A., 15 April, 1892.

<sup>90</sup> Lieut. K. Dunstan, 43rd Bn. Horticulturist; of Waikerie, S. Aust.; b. Port Germein, S. Aust., 13 Oct., 1894.

<sup>91</sup> Sgt. J. Barraclough, M.M. (No. 1132; 43rd Bn.). Contractor; of S.W. district of W. Aust.; b. Liversedge, Yorks, Eng., 23 Nov., 1874.

<sup>92</sup> C S M. S. J. McLaughlan, M.M. (No. 2425; 43rd Bn.). Prospector, of Northam, W. Aust.; b. Broken Hill, N.S.W., 1893.

<sup>93</sup> The mill had lately been bombarded into a mere heap of débris.

<sup>94</sup> Lieut. W. G. Harrington, 43rd Bn. Clerk; of Prospect, S. Aust.; b. Prospect, 20 Dec., 1892.

<sup>95</sup> Sgt. E. E. V. Roberts, D.C.M. (No. 994; 43rd Bn.). Railway porter; of West Torrens, S. Aust.; b. Dublin, S. Aust., 20 June, 1893.

<sup>96</sup> According to one account, the 43rd lay just beyond the wire.

<sup>97</sup> VII was the Australian post beyond the mill. An extra post, IIIA, was placed to command some dead ground on the left.

artillery was cloaking the front with a cloud which, in the still air, became so thick that, at the request of the infantry, the firing of smoke shell was presently stopped. The Stokes mortars on the right made an excellent screen with "Varley" bombs,<sup>98</sup> and a platoon of the 3rd Pioneers near Ferme de la Croix burnt 1,350 smoke candles. But part of the 11th Light Trench Mortar Battery south of the Douve was immediately detected and was so heavily shelled that, after eighty rounds had been fired, three of the four mortars there were put out of action.<sup>99</sup>

Whether through this mischance or otherwise, the German post, No. 15, just outside the right flank of the attack, was not suppressed by bombardment, and, firing with impunity into the southern parties of the 43rd, it caused the chief difficulty of the attack. In the platoon attacking Post 14, Lieutenant Burdett<sup>100</sup> was wounded, but Lance-Corporal Caddy<sup>101</sup> carried on. The leader of the platoon on the extreme right, Sergeant Stainbank,<sup>102</sup> was killed and all the other N.C.O.'s killed or wounded, but a private named Lawson<sup>103</sup> took charge and, reaching his objective with four men, captured a machine-gun. But the platoon entrusted with digging the new post (VIII) on this flank had to work under heavy fire. Its commander, Lieutenant Heal,<sup>104</sup> was soon killed. His sergeant was wounded, and command passed to Lance-Sergeant Bishop,<sup>105</sup> who also was soon wounded but held on. At the windmill post (VII) Lieutenant Terrell<sup>106</sup> was wounded, and Lieutenant

<sup>98</sup> Invented behind the lines of the 3rd Division by Lieutenant Varley, 9th Aust. Light Trench Mortar Battery. With the support of General Monash, Varley gave a demonstration of the bomb to the Army authorities. It was adopted, and through the Inventions Board Varley was given £300. He was personally to supervise its use in this action, but he was wounded three days before. (Lieut. A. S. Varley, M.C.; 9th L.T.M. Bty. Engineer; of Newcastle, N.S.W.; b. Newcastle, 17 April, 1890.)

<sup>99</sup> The other was carried to a forward position and continued to fire. While its ammunition was being removed, the dump was blown up and an officer and 6 other ranks wounded. The battery had 12 casualties.

<sup>100</sup> Lieut. W. J. Burdett, M.M.; 43rd Bn. Dairy farmer; of Bolivar, S. Aust.; b. Bolivar, 1896.

<sup>101</sup> Sgt. T. E. Caddy (No. 453; 43rd Bn.). Labourer; of Kapunda, S. Aust.; b. Kapunda, 1895.

<sup>102</sup> Sgt. J. T. Stainbank, D.C.M. (No. 1016; 43rd Bn.). Gardener, and manager of estate; of Montacute, S. Aust.; b. Parkside, S. Aust., 12 Oct., 1884. Killed in action, 31 July, 1917.

<sup>103</sup> Cpl. W. N. Lawson, Aust. Flying Corps. Engineer; of Brim, Vic., and Adelaide; b. Horsham, Vic., 1887.

<sup>104</sup> Lieut. J. T. Heal, 43rd Bn. Joiner; of Mullewa, W. Aust.; b. Leeds, Eng., 28 Oct., 1888. Killed in action, 31 July, 1917.

<sup>105</sup> Sgt. A. N. Bishop, M.M. (No. 235; 43rd Bn.). Gardener, and mate on Murray River steamer; of Basket Range, S. Aust.; b. Norwood, S. Aust., 12 May, 1890. Killed in action, 4 Oct., 1917.

<sup>106</sup> Lieut. P. C. Terrell, 43rd Bn. Accountant; of Walkerville district, S. Aust.; b. Gilberton, S. Aust., 24 Nov., 1882. Died, 30 April, 1936.



Moffatt,<sup>107</sup> digging the communication trench to it, was killed, but the N.C.O.'s saw to the finishing of the work. The forward line withdrew through the posts according to plan. By 9 o'clock it was known that post VIII had been established, though late. Part of the artillery switched over to throw a smoke screen for the flank of the 37th Division,<sup>108</sup> and the Australian posts waited for the certain counter-attack. The New Zealanders, after a sharp fight, had taken La Basse Ville.

It was on the 16th German Division that the II Anzac attacks had fallen, the 28th Regiment, and part of the 68th, holding the Blauwepoortbeek-Windmill front, opposite the 3rd Division, and the 29th facing the New Zealanders. At 9 o'clock bodies of Germans were seen moving from Warneton towards posts VII and VIII. S.O.S. rockets were fired, and 48 machine-guns,<sup>109</sup> massed for barrage according to the procedure now becoming usual, replied within a few seconds, followed almost instantly by the artillery. Under this barrage and fire from the posts, the German movement died away.<sup>110</sup>

During the morning German airmen flew over, and from 2 until 6 p.m. the new positions, till then free from shell-fire, were heavily bombarded. To lessen the casualties, the working parties were temporarily withdrawn. Rain fell steadily. At dusk, when the tired 42nd and 43rd were about to be relieved by the 41st,<sup>111</sup> the bombardment became intense. The Germans counter-attacked, but were kept away from most of the posts. From post VI a patrol, consisting of a scout and the only unwounded N.C.O. there, Lance-Corporal Jennings,<sup>112</sup> was now sent towards post VII (windmill). As it approached, it was fired on and the scout was wounded. Jennings brought him back and reported that Germans were in post VII. The post-garrison of the 43rd, reduced to a handful of men under a corporal, had been driven out.

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<sup>107</sup> Lieut. H. W. S. Moffatt, 43rd Bn. Municipal clerk; of Perth, W. Aust.; b. Fremantle, W. Aust., 18 April, 1893. Killed in action, 31 July, 1917.

<sup>108</sup> The 37th Division's war-diary describes the screen as "most effective."

<sup>109</sup> Mainly those of the 9th and 10th Australian and 207th British Companies. The guns of the 11th Company were forward, on the flanks, or held in reserve.

<sup>110</sup> German records state that an immediate counter-attack was made and failed everywhere except on the northern flank of the 16th Division. (In that sector, however, no British or Australian attack was made, and no post was lost.)

<sup>111</sup> The Germans possibly saw the preliminary movements in this relief, for they reported that they were attacked all along the front at 8 p.m.

<sup>112</sup> Cpl. L. S. Jennings (No. 1010; 43rd Bn.). Commercial traveller; of Adelaide, b. Kadina, S. Aust., 1 Aug., 1894.

Lieutenant-Colonel Butler<sup>113</sup> of the 43rd ordered his reserve company to recapture the post, attacking at 12.30. Nearly the whole of this company had been absorbed on other duties, but 40 men were collected under Sergeant Rayner,<sup>114</sup> son of a clergyman of Glenelg (S. Aust.). Finding his advance met by strong fire, Rayner made his way to the platoon of the 41st waiting to relieve the post, and arranged with its commander, Lieutenant Harrison,<sup>115</sup> to keep the enemy engaged with fire from the front. He then led his 40 men around the German flank, forced the Germans out—few appearing to escape—and reoccupied the post.

German records show that the enemy's counter-attack had been made at 9.10 p.m., on a fairly wide front, by the 84th Regiment against the 37th British Division, and by the 28th and 68th against the 3rd Australian Division. It succeeded only on its southern flank, at the windmill, where two men of the 3rd Australian Division were captured. A German account states that at 1 a.m. the 28th and 68th Regiments were in their turn strongly attacked (actually the attack was made only at the mill), but stood fast except at the mill, which was only given up when by flanking fire the garrison had been killed to a man.

At the first light on August 1st men of the 42nd in post III saw Germans again moving in extended order, this time towards post V. Immediately afterwards the Australian listening posts came running in with the same report. Lieutenant Gaze tried to send up his S.O.S. signal, but in the rain it would not fire. A runner, however, took the news to headquarters of the right company and the signal went up within five minutes. The machine-gun barrage came down instantly and the artillery within forty-five seconds. The Germans, caught in the barrage, advanced feebly and stopped at the wire of the Warneton Line.

These troops belonged to the 28th German Regiment, which (according to a German account) counter-attacked at 4 o'clock but made no progress owing to artillery barrage<sup>116</sup> and the wet state of the ground.

By dawn the 41st Battalion had taken over the line of posts, and, although the floods that now swamped the new trenches rendered this tour the most miserable yet experienced

<sup>113</sup> Col. C. P. Butler, D.S.O., V.D. Commanded 43rd Bn., 1917. Stock and station agent; of Prospect, S. Aust.; b. Adelaide, 16 July, 1880.

<sup>114</sup> Lieut. G. P. Rayner, D.C.M.; 11th M.G. Coy. Theological student; of Glenelg, S. Aust.; b. Strathfield, N.S.W., 27 Feb., 1894.

<sup>115</sup> The same who, as a corporal of the 9th Battalion, captured the Turkish battery at the Landing (*see Vol. I, pp. 341-2*).

<sup>116</sup> Possibly this barrage gave the Germans the impression of a British attack, for they reported that an attack by several waves against the 28th and 29th Regiments had been everywhere repulsed.

by the battalion, all the captured positions were retained.<sup>117</sup> Thus the 3rd Division's attack completely succeeded, though at fairly heavy cost, the 11th Brigade suffering 550 casualties.<sup>118</sup> The German loss is unknown, but 50 were captured. On the rest of the Second Army front the IX and X Corps seized and held their objectives, except at "Rifle Farm" (IX Corps). The protracted and rather costly nature of some of these operations drew criticism from the Second Army staff. But limited attacks against a somewhat shadowy outpost-line, close in front of an invulnerable position from which reserves would issue strongly supported by artillery, could not fail to be difficult. Undoubtedly they tied down for the time being some German artillery and potential reserves, although the German command was never in real doubt as to the true object and direction of Haig's offensive.

The results of the first day's fighting in the main offensive were regarded by Haig as "most satisfactory."<sup>119</sup> His intelligence staff had evidence that the Germans had thrown in a great proportion of their immediately available reserves. Gough was at once ordered to arrange with Anthoine the objectives for the new advance, which would be launched as soon as the artillery preparations had been carried out.

Yet in two respects the situation was not favourable. First, the rain continued to pour beyond all reasonable expectation. Even in the drained country far behind the battlefield the farmers' carts had in places to splash for half-a-mile through shallow lakes of water on their way to the market towns.<sup>120</sup> The battlefield became a bog; in every depression the flooded craters lay brim to brim like the footprints of monstrous animals in the slimy margin of some primeval waterhole.<sup>121</sup> Streams and drains, their courses dammed by the tearing up of the ground, were no more than a string of waterfilled mud-holes, in many places impassable. Elsewhere men could walk, but with effort.

<sup>117</sup> Reports of the Germans in this sector, which were unusually inaccurate, stated that at 9.50 on the following night (August 1) the 68th Regiment reoccupied the mill, but had to abandon it later "by command."

<sup>118</sup> The 42nd had 169 (including Lieutenant N. D. Freeman, a Duntroon graduate, of Southport, Q'land, killed), 43rd, 221; 44th, 88, 41st, 37; 11th L.T.M. Battery, 12.

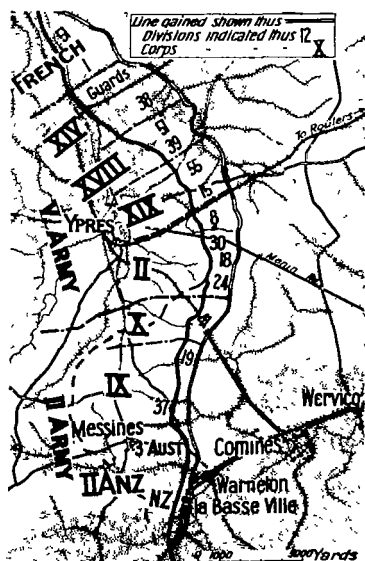
<sup>119</sup> This is the opinion given in his report to the War Office.

<sup>120</sup> See Vol. XII, plate 353.    <sup>121</sup> See Vol. XII, plates 355, 372.

The second unfavourable condition was that the most important objective, the higher land east of Ypres, where (to use the illustration already given) the blade of the sickle joined its handle, had not been taken. For the moment no second attempt could be made. In his despatch on August 4th Haig wrote: "As the rain still continues I cannot yet say when it will be possible to continue the offensive."

The theory of the "step-by-step" battle required that each successive attack should be a clear-cut operation—for which fine weather was probably a vital condition—and that the interval between the main strokes should not be disturbed by those difficult piecemeal attacks for local improvements of position, which had proved so exhausting in the First Battle of the Somme. The first day's attack had left ragged edges, as the staff at G.H.Q. had apprehended. Yet even so, if penetration was not a prime object, these could be dealt with in the second main stroke, although its depth might have to be still more limited in consequence.

But, notwithstanding the experience of the Somme, the conduct of the Flanders offensive at this stage was not guided by this principle. Apparently by Haig's orders, the Fifth Army, in one local attack after another, delivered in dreadful conditions of mud, on narrow fronts, against the concentrated fire of the enemy's available artillery, attempted to seize the high ground which it had failed to secure on July 31st. The first of these attacks was made on August 10th by the II Corps against Inverness Copse, Glencorse Wood, and Nonne Bosschen. Despite a short-lived success in Glencorse Wood, it failed at almost every point. A battalion,



ordered to attack again on the 12th, to save such gains as had been made, was prevented by heavy barrages from reaching the starting point.

After this action there occurred a temporary improvement of the weather. The battlefield was still largely waterlogged, and Haig, in his despatch after the fight, admitted that it would have been preferable to wait before striking his second main blow. But if he had done so he would have had to relieve all the troops, and there was no certainty that the weather conditions might not later become worse. The truth is that, holding that the morale of the Germans might be broken before winter, he was deeply convinced that the Allies could not afford to give them any respite, and was not prepared to wait longer for the sake of making success certain, especially as the Italians were about to launch another offensive and the French a strong limited attack at Verdun. The Canadian Corps also was ready to undertake an important feint at Lens. General Gough, after consulting Plumer, who was for continuance, urged Haig to break off the offensive, and from that time onward he consistently opposed the launching of attacks in wet weather.<sup>122</sup> Apparently upon Haig's insisting, he pointed out that there would be serious difficulties in attacking the heights. The German guns were evidently disposed so as to concentrate very heavy fire on Polygon Wood ridge, and progress might be more difficult there than on the flats. He suggested that the best way of taking the main ridge might be to attack where his army had found progress easier, further north.

Gough's prediction as to the difficulty of taking the ridge was correct. In the second main stroke, delivered on August 16th,<sup>123</sup> his left flank and the French, as before, seized all their objectives. In the centre the troops, weary with dragging themselves through the mud, were split up by German strong-points, and, with rifles clogged, were driven back by counter-attack. But "the strongest opposition of all," Haig wrote, "was experienced on the main ridge by the right corps of the Fifth Army."

Appreciating the tactical value of this ground, the enemy concentrated his efforts on retaining it, and every foot of our advance was bitterly contested and will doubtless continue to be so until the enemy's power of resistance is beaten down.

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<sup>122</sup> See *The Fifth Army*, p. 205.    <sup>123</sup> The "Battle of Langemarck, 1917."

Haig now recognised that his strategical object—to force the Germans away from the coast—could not be attained so soon as he had hoped, but he directed that the offensive must be maintained at all costs. In an exchange of views, which will presently be described, General Rawlinson had thrown doubt on the probability of an early German breakdown, but Haig remained confident. A big effort now, he urged, might yield greater results than many people seemed disposed to believe. The combined endeavours of the Allies, he told his army commanders on August 19th, had already deeply affected the German Army and people, who were disappointed by the inadequate results of the submarine campaign.

The army (he said) was beginning to fail. Instances of all kinds pointing to this had recently occurred which had never occurred before. By making one great effort, and by continuing this effort for the next few months, it was possible that a decision might be reached this year. . . .

In his despatch of August 21st for the British Government he stated that the Germans must already have lost 100,000 men in this offensive, and that the end of their resources was in sight.<sup>124</sup> They were now beginning to reinforce their ranks with the "1919 class" (boys of 18 of whom only 400,000 would be available); the "1920 class" (boys of 17) could not yet be ready for many months. The struggle was likely still to be severe "for some weeks," but, if the autumn was fine, he was still hopeful of clearing the coast before winter. The best course, therefore, was to continue the offensive and, if complete success is not gained before winter sets in, to renew the attack at the earliest possible moment next year.

But the offensive would have to be kept up till November, and this would entail a heavy drain on the British Army's strength. Counting the reinforcements then in sight, his infantry would probably be 100,000 short in October. He therefore ordered that all other services in France—cavalry, transport, railway construction, labour corps, army medical corps, forestry and clerical services—must comb their ranks to provide infantrymen.

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<sup>124</sup> Haig's conclusions were based on a paper written by the chief of his intelligence department, Brigadier-General J. Charteris; but Charteris noted at the time: "D.H. has not only accepted *in toto* my report . . . but he has gone much further." (*At G.H.Q.*, p. 247.)

Meanwhile the Fifth Army continued its minor attacks "under the most unfavourable conditions of ground and weather," as Haig's own despatches state. Haig told the Government:

A further advance of 3,500 yards by the right corps of the Fifth Army will give us possession of the summit of all the most important part of the main ridge, from Stirling Castle by Noordemhoek to Broodseinde, and when that has been gained events should move much faster. . . .

The Fifth Army attacked the ruined woods or their neighbourhood on August 22nd, 23rd, 24th, and 27th. But after six days of local fighting the 14th Division had made practically no advance. Since the beginning of August the British infantry had been flung into attack after attack on narrow fronts against Inverness Copse, Glencorse Wood, and the indescribable morass of Nonne Bosschen,<sup>125</sup> under concentrated fire of the enemy's available artillery. Sometimes it had aimed at objectives beyond the woods, sometimes at the woods themselves, sometimes at the troublesome strong-points between them. The Germans continually counter-attacked. At the end of the month, after terrible fighting—the German official history says that in Inverness Copse the line changed hands eighteen times—the British were still barely clinging to the edge of the two woods. Gough urged that to take the heights without more effective support from the Second Army was impossible. Haig then made a fateful decision.

From early in August the question whether the battle was being fought on right lines was still deeply concerning the staff at G.H.Q., and Haig circulated to all his army commanders on August 7th a second, admirably lucid appreciation prepared by it, in which the question was again raised whether the objectives that had been set for July 31st were not too extensive. It was pointed out that the object of the present offensive in its earlier stages was not to break through the Germans, but to wear them down. Should not the depth of the objectives be limited by consideration not merely of the range of the artillery, but of the training, discipline, and bodily strength of the infantry? Should not the objective be near enough for the troops to reach it in good order and without fatigue, so

**The Question  
of Tactics**

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<sup>125</sup> See Vol. XII, plate 372.

that they could resist the counter-attack and prepare quickly for the next advance?<sup>126</sup>

This paper drew another remarkably clear appreciation, this time from General Rawlinson. He pointed out that the British command had never yet attempted to conduct a wearing-down battle with planned, logical methods, but had relied too much on its belief that a breakdown of the German Army's morale was within sight.

We have never yet set ourselves deliberately to carry out a battle of attrition on absolutely definite lines, with successive objectives well within covering range of the artillery and well within the physical capacity of the infantry. We have never issued hard and fast orders that these objectives are not to be exceeded however easily they may be gained. We have never set ourselves to work to deliver a succession of carefully worked out hammer blows on the enemy at short intervals with the object of definitely beating him to his knees so that there is no question that his morale is finally broken. Then, and not till then, shall we be able to take liberties. When that stage is reached, moreover, we shall know it instinctively. It will not be a matter of conjecture built up on the reports of prisoners and deserters. It will be an established fact known to every man in our own as well as in the enemy's ranks.

Although Haig does not appear to have been at first impressed by Rawlinson's views, the action which he now took was as effective as if he had completely adopted them. Believing that the southern heights were the key to the ridge, he decided, on August 26th, to make them the centre of his ensuing thrusts. For this purpose he handed over the attack on them to the Second Army under General Plumer, transferring to him the front of Gough's southernmost (II) corps, which faced them. Gough's army would still co-operate on the left, and as he had already planned another local operation to capture the woods, he was to complete it before handing over control. When this attack took place next day, and failed, Haig authorised him to make still another;<sup>127</sup> but Plumer, planning his own operation on strictly "step-by-step" lines, desired to take over the front on September 1st in order to attack—given fair weather—on the 20th. Rather than delay preparation, he asked to be allowed to include the capture of the woods in the plan for that day's general advance.

<sup>126</sup> This staff paper raised a second important point. As the Germans held their front lines weakly, and depended on resistance and counter-attack further back, army commanders were asked whether they should not use for attacking the more distant objectives stronger forces than for the nearer ones. The practice had hitherto been the opposite—to throw two brigades at the nearer objectives and a third through them at the more distant.

<sup>127</sup> Not, however, unless the weather was suitable.



Gough, consulted by Haig, agreed. He was ordered not to undertake another major operation until Plumer launched his.

Thus Haig turned to the strict "step-by-step" method which, as Rawlinson truly said, had never yet been given a trial by the British. Of the continual local attacks that had been made in August, little is said in the official despatches, the reader of which might almost gather that, apart from the second general attack of August 16th, the operations of August were regarded by Haig as being of minor importance. Yet in this maintenance of pressure by the old Somme methods, not in the least adapted for attrition, lay the tragedy of the August offensive.

The harm done had been irreparable. First, these events had convinced the British Prime Minister and some members of the War Cabinet that from the Ypres offensive nothing was to be expected except a series of attainments, each acclaimed in the press as a "victory," but each, except the first, really insignificant in every result but that of exhausting possibly both sides, certainly the British. Owing to the losses incurred, Lloyd George had, by August 23rd, resolved to endeavour to stop the offensive in ten days' time<sup>128</sup> and divert the Allies' effort into the Italian theatre. He and his colleagues can hardly be blamed for inconsistency—the conditions on which they had always insisted had not been adhered to: the "step-by-step" battle for whose success they were waiting had not been fought. Instead, there had been continual local fighting and heavy consequent loss. Between August 5th and September 9th the British forces in France suffered 109,000 casualties, and during August the II Corps alone suffered 27,300—that is, more than the total German loss in the "tragedy" of Messines.<sup>129</sup>

A second result was equally serious. The fighting in August overtaxed and discouraged the British troops to an extent which their stubborn Commander-in-Chief did not realise, but which was obvious to everyone in touch with the true feeling on that battlefield. War correspondents like Philip Gibbs<sup>130</sup> were sensitive to the truth. The German

<sup>128</sup> See the entry on that date in Sir Henry Wilson's diary.

<sup>129</sup> The loss of the Fourth German Army, exclusive of the Ypres and Nord Groups, for the whole of June was 27,197.

<sup>130</sup> Sir Philip Gibbs, K.B.E. War correspondent with the Bulgarian Army, 1912; with the French and Belgian Armies, 1914; and with the British Armies in France, 1915/18. Author and journalist; of London; b. London, 1 May, 1877.

troops saw it clearly, as the British infantry staggered through the mud to attack them, and it was from the statements of German prisoners that some notion of the facts, which gave cause for anxiety, came to the ears of General Gough. The truth was that these strokes, aimed at the morale of the German Army, were wearing down the morale of the British. Whether British commanders were aware of the facts or not, it was the August fighting that gave to the Third Battle of Ypres its baneful reputation. The fighting at Passchendaele two months later merely added to this.

Crown Prince Rupprecht, who had often been impressed by the staunch bearing of British prisoners, was shocked on August 16th by one of them saying that they would gladly have shot down the officers who ordered them to attack. On the 22nd he notes that captured soldiers again blamed the officers and the officers the staff. On the 25th he was informed by his infantry that, whereas the British would formerly hold out though outflanked, they now surrendered easily. The German infantry, on the other hand, was imbued with confidence in its own superiority.

German historians admit that their own troops were suffering to the limit of endurance; von Kuhl even believes that they suffered more than the attacking British, and in some respects their morale unquestionably suffered. But this effect was much alleviated by the fact that they won most of these fights, and the British lost them. The German official history claims the battle of August 16 as "undoubtedly a great success" for the Germans.<sup>181</sup> It is true that the Canadian attack at Lens on August 15<sup>182</sup> caused a breakdown in the set programme of reliefs for the German divisions at Ypres. Although that attack was obviously for diversion, anxiety was created (von Kuhl states) by the presence of the Canadian Corps, "some of the best troops the English had." Trustworthy divisions, previously ear-marked for Ypres, had to be kept at Lens to face them. Ludendorff, with his eyes on the French success at Verdun and the Italian offensive, could give no help.

Yet it is notable that Ludendorff still had sufficient confidence to begin, at this stage, preparations not only for attacking the Russians at Riga, but for crushing the Italians by sending eight or ten divisions to assist the Austrians. If Russia were forced to peace, a vast additional reinforcement would become available in the west.

The opinion of the British troops, carried across the Channel by thousands of wounded, could not fail to confirm the Prime Minister's opposition to the offensive. On September 25th, in spite of the success which a different method was at last bringing to British arms, Lloyd George in a

<sup>181</sup> *Schlachten des Weltkrieges, Vol. 27, Flandern, 1917*, p. 90. This account gives first credit to the German artillery, which this day fired 746,000 rounds—more than its whole consumption in the war of 1870-71. The expenditure caused some anxiety to Crown Prince Rupprecht.

<sup>182</sup> The important and interesting part played by No. 3 Australian Tunnelling Coy. in helping to make this attack possible, is described in *Appendix No. 3* (pp. 965-7).

conference held in a railway carriage at Boulogne, agreed to the reiterated French demand that the British Army should take over from the French a much larger share of the Western Front. The decision meant that neither the French Government and military chiefs nor the British Prime Minister expected results of supreme importance from the Flanders offensive.

From the August fighting the Australian infantry was so fortunate as to be spared,<sup>133</sup> but the detached artillery bore its share. That of the 2nd Division, whose new battery positions were north of Hill 60, now began to suffer severely, but the impact of the suffering had somewhat changed; in this morass of a battlefield<sup>134</sup> the services of supply bore a heavy share of the strain. A war correspondent records on August 17th a statement of Major Manton,<sup>135</sup> whose battery, the 15th, had so far lost 35 men. Manton said that in this phase of the battle the palm should go, not to those who, like himself, worked at the battery positions, but to the drivers from the waggon-lines at Dickebusch, who daily and nightly brought up ammunition across the mud.<sup>136</sup> These Australians (he added) had won themselves a special name on this battlefield for the way in which they went straight through the nightmare barrages laid on the well known tracks which they and their horses had to follow. Where many might hesitate, these men realised that the loss would be less, and the job better done, if they pushed on without hesitation.

This comment was justified. It was undoubtedly through the conduct of the drivers, as well as through that of the gun-crews and observers, that the Australian divisional

<sup>133</sup> The 3rd and, later, the 4th Divisions, holding the flooded but quiet trenches east of Messines were sufficiently uncomfortable without the added horrors of the offensive.

<sup>134</sup> On August 4 one of the 2nd Division's guns was so bogged that only one wheel could be seen above the mud.

<sup>135</sup> Major R. F. Manton, D.S.O.; 15th Bty., A.F.A. Insurance inspector; of Armadale, Vic.; b. Windsor, Vic., 9 March, 1889.

<sup>136</sup> "It was looked on almost as a cold-footed job before," Manton said, "one which did not take a man into action. But . . . like all those Australians who were supposed to be in fairly safe jobs, the drivers took a pride in showing what they could do when they came into the thick of it." He added that even the animals came to know when a shell was coming close; and if, when halted, the horses heard the whine of an approaching salvo, they would tremble and sidle closer to their drivers, burying their muzzles in the men's chests.

artilleries in this battle—as General Gough wrote when they left his army in September—“earned the admiration and praise of all.”

Artillery casualties were still high,<sup>137</sup> and the provision of officers with sufficient experience for battery command became a recognised problem. Other losses were replaced by drawing constantly on the ammunition columns at Dickebusch, and also by attaching reinforcements to the batteries. Whereas infantry in this battle was quickly relieved, the artillery had to stay on, supporting division after division. Some regular relief was obtained by officers and men at the battery positions changing over with those at the waggon-lines, and some rest was also necessarily provided through destruction of guns in action. Thus, in the 5th Division's artillery, by August 4th the 14th Brigade had 9 of its 16 eighteen-pounders out of action,<sup>138</sup> and three batteries were for a time organised as two. Another result—and a serious one—of the wear of the guns was that, in the later stages of some of these battles, the infantry, though backed by the same number of artillery brigades, was supported by far fewer guns—a result obvious to those who had to follow the barrages but not always to those who planned them.

During August and early September the infantry of the I Anzac Corps enjoyed the last stages of its four months' holiday. The two first months in the Somme **The long rest** area had been even more pleasant. Almost daily, after training, there had been sports, deliberately organised not for the expert but for the average player; and on many days there were even sweeter intervals of fishing in the streams, and other adventure.

We came out of action for a spell (wrote Gunner Bannon,<sup>139</sup> a young Irish-Australian, during the short rest of the artillery) and by Jove they gave us a good time. . . . There were two beautiful clear streams running through the place . . . some of the chaps got

<sup>137</sup> In the 1st Division two more battery commanders, Major H. F. Kingsmill and Captain A. J. Glendinning, were killed.

<sup>138</sup> Seven through wear and buffer troubles; two damaged by shells. Expenditure of ammunition now sometimes had to be restricted throughout the B.E.F.—no longer because of its shortage, but to avoid undue wear of the guns.

<sup>139</sup> Gnr. J. S. Bannon (No. 27163; 2nd A.F.A. Bde). Clerk, of Sydney and Brisbane. b. Clonskeagh, Co. Dublin, Ireland, 18 Dec., 1893. Killed in action, 7 Aug., 1918.

needles and bent them over the light of a candle. One . . . . spent the day catching all sorts of flies—from gnats to dragon-flies as big as sparrows—and frogs. Next day . . . . we fished for two or three hours, but devil a bite I got until we were just going home and then they were only wee little things. . . . Next day we could see fish everywhere . . . . but no way could we get the fish to bite. So some of the chaps made fish traps the same as the black fellows do in Aussie, and another party procured a fishing net somewhere, and they got some splendid fish with them. However, that wasn't much good to us, so one of the chaps we knock about with . . . . told us he used to shoot fish in Queensland, so the same evening we brought out one of the rifles and about 100 rounds of ammunition. This chap stripped himself (to swim and recover the catch) and we proceeded to shoot the fish. . . . We got our fish, about  $\frac{1}{2}$  lb. weight. Of course next morning everyone knew all about it, and that day the fellows went up armed with rifles and revolvers and bombs, and they did cause a stir in the ponds; but none of them got any fish.

There would follow complaints from the villagers and orders from army headquarters that the bombing of streams by Australians must cease.

Meanwhile training proceeded steadily from company exercises to those of battalion, brigade, and division. Competitions for the best trained platoon, or the best turned-out transport, culminated in divisional tournaments—that of the 5th Division being held in a field at Hénencourt on July 12th in presence of the King.<sup>140</sup> During the training frequent demonstrations were given: of barrages, by the 1st Division's artillery and trench-mortars before they went to Ypres; of contact between aeroplanes and infantry, by the 1st Brigade and the 3rd Squadron, R.F.C.; of "a platoon in attack," by the 28th Battalion and by a model platoon at the corps school. Gellibrand practised his battalions at village fighting in the ruins of Le Transloy, each unit attacking separately while the others looked on and criticised. In a final exercise of the 2nd Division, the 5th and 7th Brigades attacked three objectives on the old Somme battlefield, and the 6th then passed through them and assaulted a fourth.

Three weeks before the Ypres offensive began, I Anzac was ordered to move into G.H.Q. reserve in Flanders, evidently with a view to participation in a late stage of the great offensive; Birdwood and White believed that the corps would be allotted to the Fifth Army. The transfer to Flanders began

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<sup>140</sup> In the 1st Division's competition for the best trained platoon, the 3rd Battalion won, just beating platoons of the 8th and 10th. In the 5th Division the competition for the best drilled company was won by the 55th Battalion, "daughter" of the 3rd.

on July 26th, corps headquarters moving to Hazebrouck<sup>141</sup> and the 1st, 2nd, and 5th Divisions to neighbouring areas.<sup>142</sup> For final polish to their training, all brigades were successively sent to a special exercise area near Lumbres, where they practised methods of attack as modified by the latest experience of the Fifth Army. It had been found that the chief difficulty in recent attacks was due to the fact that here and there groups of Germans managed to survive even the heaviest barrages by sheltering in the concrete "pillboxes" which studded this battleground. By locally checking the attacking waves while the barrage moved on, these pillbox garrisons caused the waves to lose that vital protection, and this, occurring at several points, might be fatal to any attack. As a counter-measure, the British barrages were now planned to advance more slowly, with long halts at the main stages, so that, if at any point organised opposition survived, the platoons on the spot should have time to fight it down with the diverse arms now allotted to them, and to catch up the barrage before the next stage. It was ordered that in every attack-exercise such situations should be arranged.

By the time they emerged from this training, the divisions of I Anzac were very efficient instruments indeed. The troops had never been so healthy or happy, or the battalion spirit so keen. It was at this stage that Australian soldiers—in particular, the infantry—came to be known, together with the New Zealanders, as "the Diggers." The term had occasionally been heard before, but hitherto had been general only among the New Zealanders, who are said to have inherited it from

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<sup>141</sup> They were there during many bombardments of the town by a German 14-inch gun whose shell on several days burst very near Birdwood's mess. His intelligence staff-officer, Major S. S. Butler, was thus wounded, but no one cared to suggest to Birdwood that he should shift his headquarters. The headquarters of the 1st Division also were at Hazebrouck.

<sup>142</sup> Wallon Cappel (later Neuf Berquin), Renescure, and Blaringhem respectively. The shining reputation with which the divisions arrived in Second Army area was, however, soon tarnished by men of two units engaging in a "riot" in the precincts of Second Army Headquarters at Cassel, to which Haig's advanced headquarters also were moved about this time. As often happened, the "riot" was due to the British military police arresting, as "drunk," an Australian, to whose arrest his companions, and all other Australians within hail, objected on the ground that he was not drunk. The sergeant of police argued that the Australian must be drunk, having come up to him, a sergeant on duty, and asked him for the address of the nearest brothel. On the arrival of the Australian A.P.M., Major W. Smith, hastily summoned from corps headquarters, the misunderstanding was dispelled, and the "rioters" went their ways. But Cassel was thenceforth out of bounds to them.

the gum-diggers in their country.<sup>143</sup> It carried so rich an implication of the Anzac infantryman's own view of his functions and character,<sup>144</sup> that it spread like fire through the A.I.F., and by the end of the year was the general term of address for Australian or New Zealand soldiers.

By August 26th it was known to General Plumer and the corps commanders that the task of relieving the II Corps, and capturing the key position on the ridge, would be allotted to the I Anzac Corps, and that II Anzac would come in at a later stage, possibly on I Anzac's left. As each corps would fight with two divisions in line and two in reserve, a British division would have to be added to each. Birdwood, with Haig's consent, now asked Plumer that, instead of this arrangement, his own corps, I Anzac, should be kept entirely Australian by the return to it of the 4th Division, then with II Anzac; and that II Anzac (New Zealand and 3rd Australian Divisions) should be given two British divisions. In this way, he urged, Anzac divisions could be put into battle in pairs, and advantage thus taken of the longing of these troops to have other "Anzacs" beside them in action. In support of his request he pointed to the Australian Government's wish, expressed in a recent letter, that Australians should be kept in purely Australian formations. One of his generals had told him that the mere fact of serving beside other Australian divisions increased the efficiency of his own division by thirty per cent. Godley, to whom Plumer referred the matter, generously replied that Birdwood was probably right.<sup>145</sup> The 4th Division, then just coming out of the line at Messines, was accordingly transferred to I Anzac.

It cannot be said that the news of the coming transference, with its corollary of an early plunge into the offensive, was received with pleasure by the 4th Division. Even in the three well-rested divisions, which it was joining, the troops had seen

<sup>143</sup> It is certain that the term had several independent origins (see *Reveille*, July to October, 1929) and had been commonly used long before among miners in some units; but in most it was, even at this date, barely known, and its general application certainly came to the A.I.F. from the New Zealanders.

<sup>144</sup> "Tommy," on the other hand, was never a generally popular term with the British soldier, because it carried the flavour of the "superior person's" view of his attributes.

<sup>145</sup> He said that, though sorry to lose the 4th Division, he thought it would probably gain in value by transfer to Birdwood's corps. "I do not anticipate," he added, "that the introduction of two good British divisions will lessen that of mine."

too much hard fighting to welcome the prospect of more. It is true that their apparent fighting quality made a marked impression on the succession of generals who now reviewed them. The last, Sir Douglas Haig, after watching with his cold, steady scrutiny the 2nd and 5th Divisions on August 29th,<sup>146</sup> remarked to General White that they could not have marched better if they had received years of peace training. But those same troops would have strongly objected to any despatch from a war correspondent describing them as "itching for a fight."<sup>147</sup>

And yet no one living among them could help observing that, as the day for marching to the forward areas drew near, there came over them a marked eagerness. Each man had faced up to whatever private problems this battle had in store for him. There flew round the messes grim jokes as to who should inherit his friend's boots or binoculars, and, despite old dreads and horrid memories, men were obviously keen to put into use the drill they had been practising, and confident they could outplay the enemy. The excitement of the great game, which must be won, mingled with their other feelings. After the first sharp shock of disappointment,<sup>148</sup> even the 4th Division, though heavily diluted with new reinforcements<sup>149</sup> and deprived of the long rest which it expected after Bullecourt and Messines, settled down to three weeks' training, and quickly picked up the same eager spirit that animated the sister divisions.

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<sup>146</sup> He reviewed the 2nd at Campagne (see *Vol. XII, plate 360*) and the 5th at Le Mont Dupil. Birdwood, Godley, and Plumer also separately reviewed the troops about this time.

<sup>147</sup> An excellent photograph of the Australian troops at this time is given in plate 359 of *Vol. XII*.

<sup>148</sup> The 4th had had more heavy fighting in 1917 than any other Australian division, and it did not yet know that the other divisions of 11 Anzac also were to be used in the offensive. The apparent unfairness of throwing it into the fight along with the three rested divisions of 1 Anzac aroused audible protests at the parade of at least one battalion when the news was announced. But the tasks put upon this division, though severe, were not more so than those to which some of the best English, Irish, and Scottish divisions were subjected.

<sup>149</sup> The 4th Division was probably then at its lowest ebb. It had received after Bullecourt (April-May) 3,400 new reinforcements and men returned from hospital, and after Messines (June-August) 6,000. The influence of the young troops had been noticeable during the months after Messines. On one occasion some of a new draft at one of the posts fled on the approach of a German raiding party, leaving a few comrades to face the enemy and fight their way back. Moreover, the problem of absence without leave, though then troublesome in all Australian divisions, was especially so in the 4th.

In numbers, the 4th Division was at this time as strong as most British divisions but weaker than the other divisions of 1 Anzac, which during their rest had been built up to a strength equal to that of the Canadian and New Zealand divisions. The strengths were: 1st Division, 646 officers, 14,175 other ranks, 2nd Division, 567 and 13,407; 4th, 496 and 11,543; 5th, 555 and 13,179.



## CHAPTER XVIII

### STEP BY STEP. (1) THE MENIN ROAD

WHEN reviewing the 2nd and 5th Australian Divisions<sup>1</sup> before they moved to the front, Sir Douglas Haig (according to an authentic Australian record) told Brigadier-General Carruthers, D.A. & Q.M.G., I Anzac Corps,

that if we (the two Anzac corps) did our job, the Germans would have to leave the coast . . . If we could keep up our efforts through September, we should have the Germans beaten.

It was G.H.Q. and headquarters of Second Army that laid down the "wearing down" principles in accordance with which the Second Army on September 20th would direct its first blow in this process, against the main ridge at Ypres. The application of the principles was left to the corps commanders, and, by the normal procedure, the main work in producing the detailed tactical plan fell on Birdwood's chief-of-staff, the leading staff officer of the A.I.F., Major-General C. B. B. White. To some extent, other corps conformed to this plan; and, as the methods for this and for the ensuing operations were almost identical, it will be well to explain them in some detail.

The most important new<sup>2</sup> principle was that the infantry must not advance too far to preserve physical freshness and good organisation. It was consequently accepted by Birdwood and White as axiomatic that, on the main ridge at any rate, 1,500 yards was the limit of a prudent day's advance,<sup>3</sup> and even this must be achieved in several stages. The second new principle was that, as far as possible, *all* attacks must have a wide front, and that, in the interval between the main thrusts, local piecemeal operations must be avoided.<sup>4</sup> Although the front which I Anzac took over was disadvantageous for the attack, the right and centre being thrown back instead of

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<sup>1</sup> On Aug 29.

<sup>2</sup> These principles were new only in the sense that, though advocated throughout in G.H.Q. staff memoranda, they had not before been adopted in this battle. They had been much discussed since 1915.

<sup>3</sup> It was also assumed that it must be possible to lay the artillery barrage 2,000 yards beyond the farthest objective, and to deal with German batteries far beyond that.

<sup>4</sup> This rule did not always hold, but few such operations succeeded.

forward, yet, as Birdwood laid down in his preliminary instructions, "the remedy must not be an operation on a narrow front." General Plumer constantly set his face against proposals for small piecemeal attacks to straighten ragged edges left by the main strokes.<sup>5</sup> General Gough, however, was ordered by Haig to continue harassing the enemy towards Poelcappelle, principally to distract attention from the Second Army's preparations. The enemy was not harassed—three efforts made to improve the front, on September 6th, 7th, and 10th, were on each occasion defeated. General Harington wrote on September 5th to White that, owing to certain difficulties as to the time for starting his main attack, Gough suggested that the Second Army also should undertake a preliminary local advance in the I Anzac sector at Nonne Bosschen. "Sir Herbert will have none of it," the letter says. "Nothing previous to zero."

Other important points were laid down, mostly in tactical instructions issued by Second Army Headquarters. It was pointed out that the attacking troops must no longer expect to meet an enemy holding definite trench-lines. As the enemy's plan now was to let the attack penetrate and then to strike it swift and hard, the Germans disposed themselves so that their forward area was held only by a front line of scattered posts, with machine-guns distributed chequer-wise over a wide area behind it. The real line of resistance lay in rear of all this, with supports, reserves, and more machine-guns distributed in great depth. The British plan must therefore be to seize, not trench-lines, but consecutive heights or other positions favourable for defence, a separate force or "line" of troops<sup>6</sup> being charged with taking each position and digging in there so as to hold against any counter-stroke. The force attacking the earlier objectives might be lighter, and the advance there deeper and quicker, than in the later stages. The last stage must be the shortest and slowest, and carried out by the strongest force, which must be prepared to meet immediate counter-attack.

In this warfare the bomb would obviously be less used than of late, and the rifle more.<sup>7</sup> But the main defence would be the artillery barrage. As the barrage had to deal not

<sup>5</sup> See p 716

<sup>6</sup> Each line would consist of several "waves."

<sup>7</sup> The 1st Aust. Division requisitioned for 3,100,000 rounds of small arms ammunition, 36,000 Mills grenades, and 16,000 rifle-grenades for its attack.



33. EFFECT OF A BIG GERMAN SHELL ON THE BUILDING NEXT TO  
GENERAL BIRDWOOD'S HEADQUARTERS, HAZEBROUCK, 12TH AUGUST,  
1917

This was a prison and was fortunately unoccupied except by the  
keeper and his wife, who were unhurt and are seen in the picture



34. YPRES

The photograph, taken at a late stage of the battle, on 25th October, 1917, shows infantry passing through the main square towards the Menin Gate, and others returning.

with mere trench-lines, but with enemy posts extending far back through the crater-field, it must be no longer a single line of bursting shells, but a storm of shell-fire 1,000 yards deep. This must comprise five successive lines of shells or bullets with 200 yards' intervals—the nearest line laid down by 18-pounders, the next by 18-pounders combined with 4.5-inch howitzers, and the other three by the machine-guns, the 6-inch howitzers, and the 8- and 9.2-inch howitzers and 60-pounders.<sup>8</sup> At the end of each stage of the attack in order to catch any counter-attack that might approach while the troops dug in, all lines of the barrage except the first<sup>9</sup> would move steadily ahead 2,000 yards into the enemy's country. They would suddenly return, and the whole barrage would then conduct the next "line" of infantry to the next objective, until the final objective had been reached. At that objective, while the troops entrenched, both the light protective barrage and the heavy "roaming" barrage would at intervals<sup>10</sup> cease, to descend again later in the hope of catching some counter-attack. After, say, eight hours<sup>11</sup> the whole barrage would end, but it would come down again locally wherever called for by message or S.O.S. signal. It was also usually put down on the whole front for an hour at dawn on the day after the attack, that being a probable time for a counter-attack.<sup>12</sup> Most of the available machine-gun companies would be employed on the barrage, but the attacking brigades were allowed to take their own companies with them, not, as earlier in the war, for offensive purposes, but to secure immediately against counter-attack the ground

<sup>8</sup> These five lines were known as "A," "B," "C," "D," and "E." In the I Anzac barrage on Sept. 20 the interval between "D" and "E" was only 100 yards. The 60-pdr. shells gave depth to the barrage, throwing their pellets far forward. The barrage of Sept. 20 differed from that of II Anzac at Messines (*see pp. 573-4*) in that all its lines crept forward at regular pace. The heavy howitzers nevertheless did not merely fire blindly, but at each lift each of them aimed at any pillbox or other special target which happened to lie in its lane at that range.

<sup>9</sup> The first (18-pdr.) would remain 200 yards from the troops as a protective barrage.

<sup>10</sup> These intervals were usually so arranged that the troops were never wholly uncovered.

<sup>11</sup> On Sept. 20 the I Anzac barrage was to last 8 hours 8 minutes.

<sup>12</sup> As the machine-guns covering the advance could not range deeply beyond the final objective, the barrage machine-guns would be massed in two equal bodies—the first, to participate in all except the farthest stage of the creeping barrage; the second, emplaced much farther forward, to lay a barrage on any counter-attack after the final objective had been gained. On Sept. 20, as the final objective was not deep, the machine-guns for the creeping barrage also answered S.O.S. signals after the advance. In addition, by a prearranged system they concentrated their fire on any area close in front of their own or the neighbouring divisions when called upon to do so.

seized at each objective. Except for these mobile guns, the machine-gun force of the corps, which at Gallipoli had been controlled by battalions, at Pozières by brigades, and later by divisions,<sup>13</sup> was now operated as a single instrument under the corps machine-gun officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Hore. In these great set-piece attacks the artillery was controlled on an even larger scale, by the artillery commander of the army. The whole artillery of I Anzac operated as a unit under the corps artillery commander (Brigadier-General Napier). Divisional commanders nevertheless remained responsible for seeing that the barrage planned by the corps staff suited the needs of their infantry.

The first consideration that presented itself to Generals Birdwood and White, in applying these principles in a plan for seizing the ridge, was that the advance  
**The plan for Sept. 20** along the ridge involved two separate tasks, first, that of thrusting back the enemy in front, and, second, that of holding the right flank which, unlike the left, would not be covered by a general advance of the line there. White calculated that the flank protection of the ground gained by I Anzac at each blow would require the special attention of one division, and in the preliminary plan drawn up on August 28th he therefore recommended that the tasks should be separated, I Anzac concentrating its strength upon the advance, and the protection of the right flank being made the special task of the next (X) corps. This principle, adopted and followed throughout, determined the front of the Anzac attack.

Next, as to its depth. The terrain for the principal attack lay, roughly speaking, between two diverging lines, those of the Ypres-Roulers railway and of the Menin road. These resembled an open scissors, the handles touching the south and north of Ypres respectively, the two lines crossing at "Hellfire Corner,"<sup>14</sup> a mile east of the city, and the blades thereafter diverging and eventually mounting the ridge; the Menin road crossed it two miles from Hellfire Corner, at

<sup>13</sup> At Bullecourt the machine-gun operations were "co-ordinated" by the corps machine-gun officer.

<sup>14</sup> A point perpetually shelled (see Vol. XII, plate 361).

Clapham Junction, and the railway four miles from Hellfire Corner, at Broodseinde. Near Ypres the area traversed by these tracks consisted entirely of abandoned fields, long since grown into moorland, with a few half-broken buildings. The shell-holes, thickly scattered through the long grass near the old city moat and ramparts,<sup>16</sup> became more frequent as one went east. At Hooze,<sup>16</sup> where the front had lain for some years near the point at which the Menin road began gently to mount to the main ridge, all marks on the original surface were completely erased. Through that village even the road was untraceable, and the village site was only marked by a cluster of mine-craters. Of the tall wood that once surrounded Bellewaarde Chateau<sup>17</sup> only the bare trunks remained, and the neighbouring "lake" resembled some foul pool left in a hollow of an upheaved ocean bed. From here for two or three miles onwards, on both the main ridge and its northern spurs, the destruction was almost as complete. Westhoek, on the second spur, was marked only by the line of pillboxes which the Germans had built in its ruins.<sup>18</sup> On the main ridge the woods had been shredded to stubble, and the slight depressions of the Polygon Wood plateau on the crest, as well as the hollows on either side, had been turned into bog.<sup>19</sup>

The attack of July 31st and subsequent efforts of the II Corps had carried the British front from Hooze two-thirds of a mile, to the beginning of the main crest at Clapham Junction. It was at this point that, to use another simile, already adopted, the handle of the sickle-shaped ridge met the curved blade. To the south, the British line ran along the handle; to the north, it lay along the second (Westhoek) spur, the position here reached being generally that of the old German "Albrecht Stellung." Forward of Westhoek, as far as 500 yards down the gentle slope to the Hannebeek stream, the British had a line of detached posts, in old trenches, pillboxes, or ditches. On the main ridge they held a solitary outpost 150 yards inside Glencorse Wood, another outside its southern edge, and others further south fringing Inverness Copse in the X Corps area.

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<sup>16</sup> See Vol. XII, plate 410

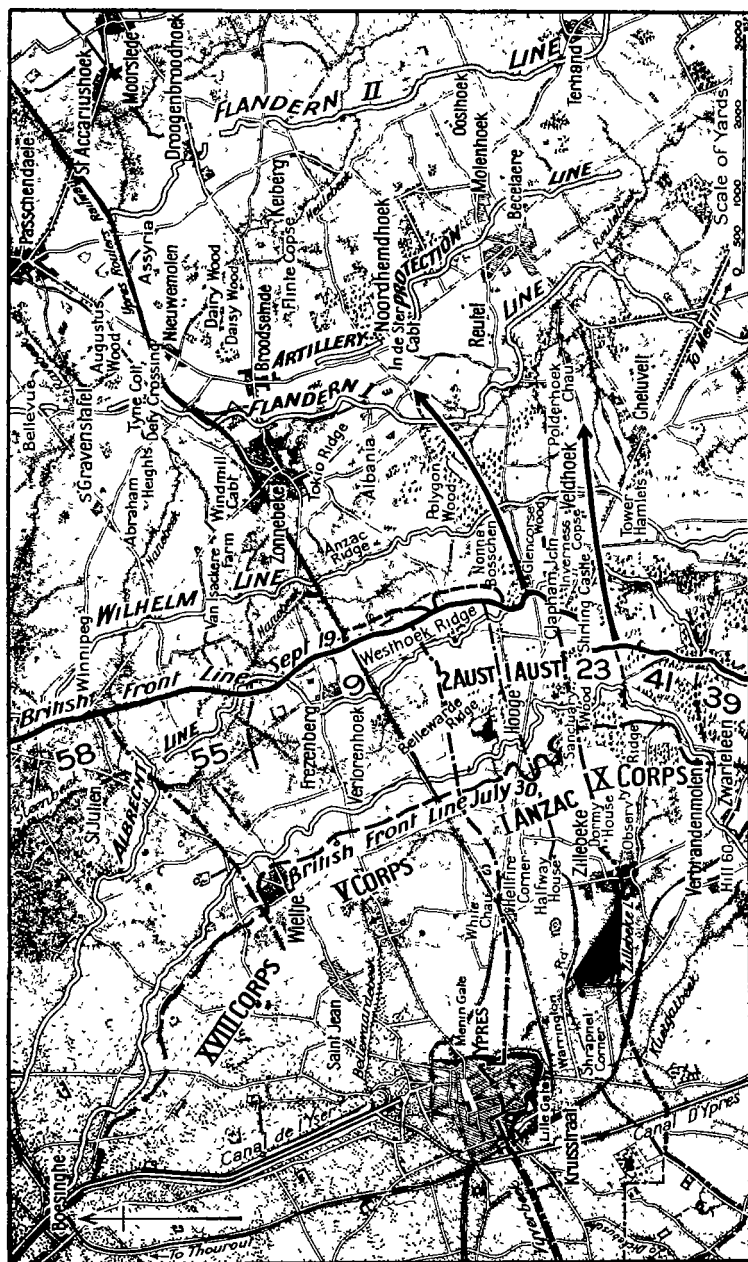
<sup>16</sup> See Vol. XII, plates 348-9.

<sup>17</sup> On the first northern spur, immediately north-east of Hooze.

<sup>18</sup> See Vol. XII, plates 362, 381.

<sup>19</sup> See Vol. XII, plates 355, 372.

Map No. 4



THE BATTLEFIELD EAST OF YPRES ON 19TH SEPTEMBER, 1917, SHOWING THE BRITISH FRONT ON THAT DATE AND THE MAIN GERMAN DEFENCE LINES

The arrows indicate the direction of the impending thrusts by the I Anzac and X Corps. (On this map and in the sketches the thick white lines indicate the successive German defence lines, including the old front held before the battle of Messines.)



In front of the British line there stretched away a dun-coloured wilderness in which British patrols and airmen had located, scattered in pillboxes, ditches, and shell-holes, 150-200 yards away, the thin German outpost-line. This position was known to the Germans as the "crater line"; but the enemy's main line of resistance lay along an old trench-system ("Wilhelm Stellung") which crossed the crest at the western edge of Polygon Wood and thence ran northwards along the third or "Anzac" spur (so called from a strong pillbox to which this name had been given by the British troops).<sup>20</sup> The German supports lay partly on the fourth or "Tokio" spur (also named from a prominent pillbox), but chiefly on the main height, which here curved northward to Broodseinde village. On its nearer slope lay another defence line, the "Flanders I Line,"<sup>21</sup> just beyond the desolate flats and ruins of Zonnebeke village.<sup>22</sup> Behind the main ridge, in huts or bivouacs, lay the reserve battalions of the German garrison, ready for immediate counter-attack, and farther back still, in village billets, the counter-attack divisions. German prisoners, captured almost daily, were questioned as to what troops these were, and as to the routes by which they would move forward. Aeroplane photographs were daily studied for the same purpose, and circulars and maps containing the information thus amassed were, from the beginning of September, sent to all Australian units about to take part in the offensive, the stream of information swelling to a flood as the battle-day approached.

In his appreciation written on August 28th General White pointed out that the force attacking along the main ridge could not strike deeper than the force protecting its right. In the first attack the task of the flanking force would obviously be the capture of the first southward-leading spur,<sup>23</sup> on which lay the ruins of Veldhoek village and the buildings known as "Tower Hamlets." This hill and that on which the Australians would be operating were separated by the valley of the Reutelbeek, a muddy stream which was made the boundary between the two corps. If the X Corps seized

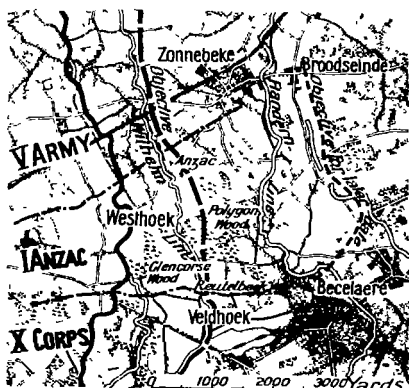
<sup>20</sup> A pillbox in the dip beyond it was named "Helles."

<sup>21</sup> It crossed the crest beyond Polygon Wood "Flanders II" Line ran along the Keiberg—a height beyond the main ridge

<sup>22</sup> See Vol. XII, plate 384

<sup>23</sup> Beyond the Bassevillebeek. On a second feature of the same spur by Gheluvelt, which it was not proposed at this stage to capture.

this spur, I Anzac on the main ridge could safely reach the edge of Polygon Wood, but no farther. After seeking the advice of Lieutenant-General Jacob<sup>24</sup> of the II Corps, whose troops had fought over the ground, Birdwood on September 4th recommended that the Second Army's first step should be the seizure of the heights as far as the near edge of Polygon Wood, together with Veldhoek Spur on the south and Anzac Spur on the north. The part of I Anzac would be to seize, with two divisions, the main ridge and Anzac Spur. The subsequent capture of the two next important lengths of the main ridge as far as Broodseinde would require two more steps. As Birdwood and White desired to make each successive attack a straight one, whereas the ridge tended northwards, it would be necessary for the corps front to be shifted northwards before the next stroke, and so on, the X Corps conforming and continuing to guard the right.



To make certain of achieving the main task, Birdwood and White recommended, not only that the first step should be made in three stages of 800, 400-500, and 200-300 yards respectively, but that the corps front should be narrowed to 2,000 yards (1,000 for each division at the jumping-off line, expanding to 1,250 at the objective). To allow this, the Fifth Army was asked to extend its front for 800 yards south of the Ypres-Roulers railway. In conference on August 30th Haig pointed out that (to quote a report of the meeting)

the operations of the Second Army for the capture of Polygon Wood Ridge were of vital importance, and that the principle must be accepted that every chance of success should be given to these operations by allowing other considerations to give way as might be necessary.

<sup>24</sup> Field-Marshal Sir Claud Jacob, G.C.B., G.C.S.I., K.C.M.G. Commanded Meerut Div., 1915, 21st Div., 1915/16; II Army Corps, 1916/19; Commander-in-Chief, India, 1925-30. Officer of Indian Regular Army; of Devonshire and London; b. Mehidpore, Central India, 21 Nov., 1863.

Gough agreed to extend his flank as desired. The result of these and other measures was that the I Anzac and X Corps were enabled to attack with five divisions<sup>25</sup> a sector 1,000 yards less extensive than that attacked by the II Corps on July 31st with three.

The deliberate advance required by the new tactics was provided for as follows. When the attacking troops had formed up with the foremost line on tapes ahead of the front trench, but behind the outposts, the barrage would descend 150 yards beyond them, the most forward posts being withdrawn half-an-hour before it fell. After remaining stationary for three minutes to allow the force to move up close behind it, the barrage would advance at what was now considered the comparatively fast rate of 100 yards in 4 minutes,<sup>26</sup> but after 200 yards it would slow down to 100 yards in 6 minutes. This would be kept up until the first objective (known as the "Red Line") was reached. After a pause for reorganisation—eventually fixed at one hour—the next line of troops would move at a still slower pace, 100 yards in 8 minutes, to the second objective (the "Blue Line"); and, after a long pause there—eventually settled at two hours—they would proceed at the same slow pace to the final objective ("Green Line"). It was expected that the enemy's counter-attack would move against them either during the third advance or soon after. On defeating it, they would be relieved as soon as possible by fresh divisions which, a few days later, must undertake the next step.

These plans so far as they were the suggestions of I Anzac were accepted practically without alteration by the Second Army, and the Fifth Army arranged its advance generally to conform with them.<sup>27</sup> For this first operation Birdwood chose the 1st and 2nd Australian Divisions, the 1st to seize the main ridge, the 2nd the Anzac Spur.

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<sup>25</sup> The X Corps employing three on a total front of 2,750 yards, and I Anzac two on a front of 2,000 yards

<sup>26</sup> In the early days of the creeping barrage the rate was much faster, usually 100 yards in 2 minutes. This rate was maintained even for the attack in the terrible mud at Flanders on 5 Nov., 1916. During the first half of 1917 the Anzac rate for an attack in good weather had been 100 yards in 3 minutes.

<sup>27</sup> A few alterations were made. As usual with leaders of oversea troops, Generals Birdwood and White were in favour of action a little—but in this case only a little—quicker than that decided on.

The Fifth Army, which would attack on the lower ground to the north, arranged for a preparatory bombardment lasting twenty-four hours, but the Second Army proposed to prepare for the main operation with a seven days' bombardment in every way as thorough as that which had preluded the Fifth Army's stroke of July 31st, and supported by an even denser concentration of artillery.<sup>28</sup> I Anzac was given 9 brigades of field artillery (216 guns) and 46½ siege or heavy batteries (208 guns)—a concentration slightly denser than a gun to 5 yards—and the X Corps was given a gun to 5½ yards.<sup>29</sup> Through considerations of ammunition-supply, however, G.H.Q. shortened the preliminary bombardment (except as to counter-battery fire) to five days.

<sup>28</sup> Plumer had a gun to every 5.2 yards of offensive front, as against Gough's 1 to 6 yards on July 31, his heavy guns stood 1 to 11.8 yards as against 1 to 18 on July 31, but his field artillery amounted to 1 to 12.6 yards as against 1 to 11.7. Plumer's original plans envisaged an expenditure of 3½ million shells in the 7 days' preliminary bombardment and the day of attack. His artillery staff proposed to deal with 550 German gun-positions in 7 days' counter-battery work. He was given, for his active front, 1,205 guns, of which 575 were heavy and 720 (30 brigades) field artillery. (He had asked for 547 heavy pieces and 33 brigades—total 1,339 guns.)

<sup>29</sup> The artillery under command of the G.O.C.R.A., I Anzac, for this battle was,—

**Field Artillery. Supporting 1st Division** (C.R.A.—Brig.-General W. A. Coxen)

"A" Group (Lieut.-Col. H. E. Cohen)—3rd, 6th, and 12th Aust. Army F.A. Bdes.

"B" Group (Lieut.-Col. W. G. Allsop)—7th and 8th A.F.A. Bdes. (3rd Aust. Div. Arty.).

Also heavy and medium trench-mortar batteries of 1st and 3rd Aust. Divns.

**Supporting 2nd Division** (C.R.A.—Brig.-General G. J. Johnston):

"C" Group (Lieut.-Col. T. I. C. Williams)—10th and 11th A.F.A. Bdes. (4th Aust. Div. Arty.).

"D" Group (Lieut.-Col. J. L. Shellshear)—4th and 5th A.F.A. Bdes. (2nd Aust. Div. Arty.).

Also heavy and medium trench-mortar batteries of 2nd and 4th Aust. Divns.

(The artillery of the 1st and 5th Divisions was resting after its trying service in July and August. The 3rd, 6th, and 12th Aust. "Army" Brigades had come from Nieuport.)

**Heavy Artillery:** Heavy Artillery groups, comprising 46½ heavy and siege batteries—

Left Double Bombardment Group (under staff of 57th H.A.G.)—10th and 30th H.A.G's, 12 batteries.

Right Double Bombardment Group (under staff of 31st H.A.G.)—53rd and 24th H.A.G's, 10½ batteries.

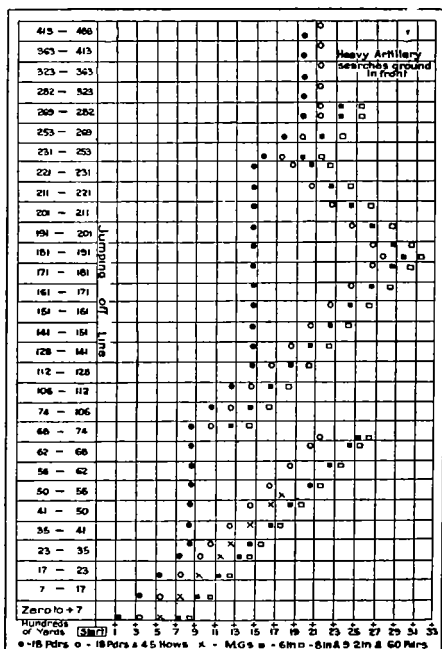
Northern Counter-Battery Group (under staff of 28th H.A.G.)—22nd and 28th H.A.G's, 12 batteries, including four of 60-pdrs.

Southern Counter-Battery Group (under staff of 66th H.A.G.)—35th and 66th H.A.G's, 12 batteries, including two of 60-pdrs.

Although I Anzac's infantry front was only 2,000 yards, its counter-batteries were responsible for a 3,500 yards' front; moreover, the infantry front would expand to 2,500 at the third objective.

Each divisional commander was given control of two of the 6-inch howitzer batteries and of one brigade of field artillery for use in any special tasks. These field artillery brigades took part in the barrage but their fire was superimposed

The preparation included every day two practices of the great attack-barrage, these practice barrages lasting not for a mere ten or twenty minutes each, as in previous battles, but for anything from half-an-hour up to an hour and forty minutes. They would begin sometimes from the enemy's forward area and sweep backwards, sometimes from his back area and sweep forwards. At other times the field-artillery barrages would sweep forwards and those of the heavy artillery backwards until they met, when the combined storm would advance again. The barrage always ended by a jump back to its starting line, or to some area in which the enemy's garrison might have emerged from its shelter. Orders for the complete barrage were now issued partly in the form of diagrams—different from the laddered maps showing the field artillery barrage—with vertical lines for each hundred yards' lift and horizontal lines for time, and with the five sections of the barrage marked thereon, diverging, meeting, advancing together like a run of chords in a musical score. The object of the practice barrages was, first, to train the gunners; second, to harass the enemy; and, third and most important, to teach him not to expect attack whenever a barrage fell, but to be slow in emerging from shelter. To



upon that of the other brigades, so that they might at any time be drawn off for special work without leaving gaps in the barrage.

(The 54th Aust. Siege Battery was now under I Anzac, having come with the 22nd H.A.G. from Nieuport. The 55th Aust. Siege Battery was still under the X Corps, but had shifted on Sept 8 from Vierstraat to Voormezele. At this stage

accustom him to fire similar to that preceding the attack, three of the practice barrages were extended along the whole front of Second Army; and on several occasions they were preceded, as they would be on the attack-day, by four hours' steady "neutralising" fire with gas-shells upon the German battery-positions. Suppression of all known German batteries was ordered to begin as soon as the Second Army took charge, and during the bombardment the artillery would endeavour to destroy every known pillbox,<sup>30</sup> machine-gun position, observation-post, and telephone exchange. The German garrison and artillery would be isolated, so far as possible, by two slow barrages maintained, chiefly at night, on his more distant and nearer communications; but certain routes were to be left free from shell-fire, so that the enemy might be coaxed into using them, and might later be caught there.<sup>31</sup>

These preparations were but a fraction of the preliminary work. To ensure that, despite the confusion of battle, the system of communication and control should throughout be firmly established and clearly marked, not only were the various advanced headquarters and telephone centres within the existing lines early chosen, and deep dugouts excavated for the brigade staffs<sup>32</sup> and signal cables buried, but attacking battalions had to select beforehand their proposed headquarters in the enemy's area, so that tracks to them could be

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siege batteries, except those heavier than 9.2-inch, were being expanded from four guns to six, a step already taken with the 60-pounder batteries. The two Australian siege batteries were expanded by the breaking-up on July 21 of the new 338th Aust. Siege Battery in England.)

**Machine-guns.** A very important part in the barrage was now played by the machine-guns. The machine-gun companies of I Anzac were. 1st Divn—1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 21st, 2nd Divn—5th, 6th, 7th, and 22nd; 4th Divn—4th, 12th, 13th, and 24th; 5th Divn—8th, 14th, 15th, and 25th. Each had 16 guns—total 256. The 4th Division's companies were left at rest. The force employed was

Under corps machine-gun officer (Lieut.-Col. L. F. S. Hore)—seven companies (1st, 6th, 8th, 14th, 15th, 21st and 22nd), 112 guns.

With attacking division—2nd, 3rd, 7th, and 5th companies (64 guns).

Of the corps guns, 56 were emplaced in the support positions for the creeping barrage and 56 in the front-line area for S.O.S. (i.e., to repel the expected counter-attack during and after the battle).

<sup>30</sup> These might be destroyed by the direct hit of an 8-inch or larger shell. Only a comparatively small proportion was ever actually destroyed.

<sup>31</sup> It may have been the leaving of these routes that rendered the "isolation barrage" ineffective, for it was found that Germans captured in the attack had not gone short of food and a fair supply was found in their shelters.

<sup>32</sup> For the 2nd and 3rd Brigades (1st Division), in one of the craters at Hocge; and for the 5th and 7th (2nd Division), in the old British front line not far away, near Cambridge Road. These dugouts (and others at "Halfway House" for the 1st Brigade) were tunnelled in blue clay by the 1st Australian Tunnelling Company. The 5th and 7th Brigades during the action occupied advanced headquarters on Westhoek Ridge.

made and marked as the advance proceeded. Fighting tanks would obviously be useless in this crater-field—the edge of the ridge was littered with their wrecks. I Anzac therefore intimated that it would attack without them; but two, fitted with wireless apparatus, were to form a wireless station in Glencorse Wood to assist communication, and several carrier tanks were to transport forward some heavy artillery.

The most awkward problem for the I Anzac staff was to devise a scheme for bringing forward so many troops on to so small a front through the allotted ribbon of back area, and for bivouacking a great part of them there during the day before the attack. At the same time the British garrison had to be passed out. "I never had a task of greater difficulty," wrote General White long afterwards. It was solved by making use of all available shelter (including part of the German tunnel under the Menin road), and by "borrowing" from both the neighbouring corps certain lengths of road during the vital hours. Forward of Ypres, for the infantry moving up to attack, duckwalks were laid largely across country, to be everywhere marked, at the last moment, by directing signposts.

Much more laborious, and, in extent, peculiar to this battlefield, was the preparatory work upon roads and railways for the guns and ammunition. As the operations would comprise a rapid succession of steps, Birdwood and White laid it down that the roads and railways required for the preparation for the second step must be ready by the day fixed for the *first* step. An inspection of the sector, however, showed that, except for a light railway in course of construction near Hooze, and for some improvement of the Ypres-Menin road (which also led to Hooze, though barely passable in the forward area), no such provision for the second step had been made. Almost the entire engineering force of the corps was therefore, from September 7th to 19th, concentrated on the work of providing new forward and lateral tracks. The details of that work will be described in the narrative of the second stage.<sup>55</sup> In the midst of these preparations Birdwood was asked by Second Army for his plans for the second step. He decided that, assuming that

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<sup>55</sup> See pp 791-5.

the first was successful, the second could be made on September 26th, I Anzac's part in it being undertaken by the 4th and 5th Australian Divisions. Orders for the forward movement of these divisions were issued, and the tactical problems were placed before the divisional commanders.

The heavy pressure of the staff work at this stage was evident to all who were aware of these preparations. General Harington offered to come to General White at any time for consultation. "It will save you time and that is all that matters, as you are the busiest man." On the eve of the battle Harington wrote to him:

The task in that area has been terrific . . . We all realise what a hard time you have had and in what a splendid way you have dealt with it . . . I won't worry you during the fight.

The chief desire at this time was that the battlefield should dry up and the preparations be carried through without discovery by the enemy. Partly to assist in ensuring an element of surprise, but, even more, to keep the Australian divisions fresh until the attack, it was arranged that the I Anzac front should be held by the 25th British Division until September 12th, and then by the 47th Division until September 16th, the Australians only beginning to come in four nights before the assault.<sup>84</sup> Birdwood ordered them to be careful not to let their presence become known to the enemy before the attack.

The first fortnight of September was, for this battlefield, a quiet time, and, the month being as bright and warm as August had been wet, the ground gradually dried. In appearance it changed from a morass to a desert. Westhoek Ridge, in particular, with its crest of broken farms and pillboxes, recalled to some Australians the rock-crowned ridges of the Libyan Desert among which they had trained at Mena Camp. It was reported that some of the hollows in which previous attacks had stuck fast still remained waterlogged. But the areas of these bogs were slowly shrinking, and the troops about to attack there were prepared to pass round them, if necessary.

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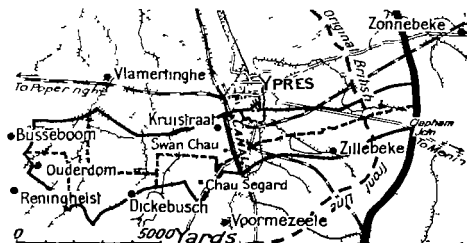
<sup>84</sup> For a few days the prospect of this most advantageous arrangement was endangered by the Fifth Army's project of renewing the local attack on Glencorse and Inverness Woods. General Plumer was informed that after the intended operation neither the 25th nor the 47th Division would be in a condition to withstand a serious counter-attack. The fortunate abandonment of the proposed local attack rendered possible the desired plan.



On September 15th the main bombardment began, and the tension immediately increased. The Germans hit back with spiteful barrages on Westhoek and just in rear of the main crest and behind the spurs. Under cover of the second British practice barrage, on the afternoon of September 15th, a raiding party of the 7th London Regiment (47th Division) rushed the ruins of a farm between Glencorse Wood and Inverness Copse, capturing 36 prisoners and a machine-gun, and so cleared away a German post inconveniently close to the intended forming-up ground for the attack. The new post of the Londoners, in the ditch of the old farm orchard, behind a shallow block of sandbags, was counter-attacked early next morning, but held on, although the gallant youngster who had led the raiding party and had since commanded the post, Lieutenant Cryer,<sup>38</sup> was killed. The post was given his name.

The infantry of I Anzac began to move forward from its long rest on September 12th, the 2nd Division marching that day to Reninghelst and the 1st Division next day to Ouderdom, both villages in the hopfields of Flanders four miles south-west of Ypres. British camps, hutments, and railhead and other dépôts were scattered thickly throughout this low but, in summer, not unpleasant country; and the German air force, now imitating the bombing and low-flying tactics of the British, came over on every moonlit night and often at midday, to bomb camps or attack with machine-

guns columns of troops on the open roads. At no time within the experience of Australian infantry were the German airmen so active behind the lines. The recurrent beat of their twin-engines, unmistakably distinct from the mosquito-like



*The I Anzac Corps area, Sept. 1917.*

<sup>38</sup> Lieut. B. N. Cryer, 7th Bn, London Regt. Draper; of London; b. Ealing, Middlesex, Eng., 25 Dec., 1891. Killed in action, 16 Sept., 1917.

tune of the British aeroplanes, was heard nightly overhead, and the tension caused by listening to the approaching or receding noise, until the airman dropped his seven bombs, usually in quick succession, caused the night's rest to lose some of its value. At the end of September it was rumoured that as many as 500 casualties were caused in the camps and waggon-lines about Ypres in a single moonlit night. Yet the danger was never regarded as more than an annoyance. In the A.I.F. the loss was small, and for many Australians the practice merely afforded an additional side-show, especially at night, when the searchlights, which were now being increasingly distributed for aircraft detection, caught the aeroplane, like a silver moth, in their beams, and held it in focus while the shrapnel of the anti-aircraft batteries twinkled around it.

On the night of September 16th the 47th (London) Division was relieved—by the 1st Brigade (1st Australian Division) on the edge of Glencorse Wood, and by the 6th Brigade (2nd Australian Division) on Westhoek Spur. Like the troops they relieved, these two Australian brigades were merely to hold the line, each with a single battalion, until parts of the attacking brigades took it over on the night of September 18th. The arrangements for bringing in the attacking brigades were governed by the dispositions for the assault. Except that the two Australian divisions expected stronger resistance, and therefore made more provision for the final stage, these dispositions were much the same throughout Second Army. Each Australian division on its 1,000-yard sector would attack with two brigades in line,<sup>80</sup> each brigade using one battalion to capture the first objective and another to take the second, but keeping two available for the third. General Walker of the 1st Division, which had the principal task, on the ridge itself, devoted both these battalions in each brigade to the attack on the final objective. General Smyth of the 2nd Division, whose final objective was Anzac Spur, allowed both his brigadiers to attack it with one

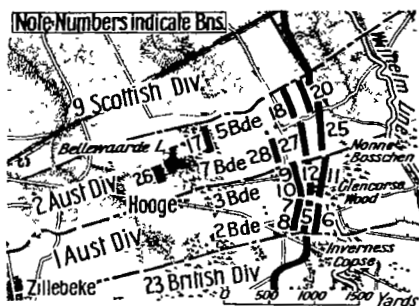
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<sup>80</sup> At Fromelles the 5th Division's front was 1,950 yards—the objectives were shallow and the division attacked with three brigades. At Pozzières the 1st Division's front was 1,800 yards, the objectives were shallow, and two brigades were employed. At Bullecourt the front of attack was 1,300-1,400 yards, the objectives were deep, and two brigades were employed. At Messines the 3rd Division's front was 2,100 yards (the average for each British division was 1,900). At Ypres on July 31 the average front of each British division was 1,300 yards.

battalion each, the right brigadier keeping his fourth battalion close behind for emergency,<sup>37</sup> and the left brigadier holding his in reserve in the present front line.<sup>38</sup>

There were also differences in the manner in which the commanders of the two Australian divisions moved their troops into action. The reader will remember that an important rule of the current British system of attack was that the assaulting waves, by assembling as far forward as possible and hurrying over the first part of the advance, should quickly get clear of the area (the British front line) on which the German artillery would lay its barrage as soon as the German infantry fired its S.O.S. flares. The successive waves and lines might therefore assemble at a few yards' distance from one another to start with, but, after "tucking in its tail" until the barrage area was passed, the attack would shake out to its proper distances. The special advantage of this procedure for the coming attack had probably been impressed upon General Walker (1st Division) by the numerous reports of concentration of German shell-fire on the main ridge. He decided to get his whole attacking force forward of the German barrage at the start, and to keep it there. His two attacking brigades (2nd and 3rd)<sup>39</sup> would therefore assemble complete at the front line. The battalions for the first objective (6th and 11th) would have their jumping-off tapes 150 yards ahead of the main trench, but behind the outposts; those for the second (5th and 12th) on the front trench; and those for the third (8th, 7th, 10th, and 9th) close behind it.

General Smyth (2nd Division), on the other hand, allowed his brigadiers (Wisdom of the 7th and Smith of the 5th Brigade) to keep back for two



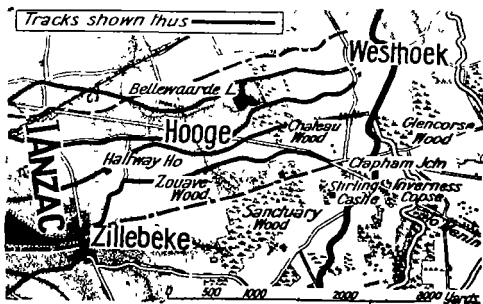
<sup>37</sup> If not required for attack, it would dig a communication trench back from the captured front.

<sup>38</sup> The 2nd Division's second objective also was on Anzac Spur, and, on the left, lay so close behind its final objective that the putting of three battalions into this area would have involved overcrowding.

<sup>39</sup> Under Brig.-Generals J. Heane and H. Gordon Bennett respectively.

and a half hours their battalions for the final objective (28th, 26th, and 17th), and then send them forward through the German barrage. Before deciding on the positions in which these battalions would lie while waiting to advance, brigade and battalion staffs carefully noted where the German barrages<sup>40</sup> fell, and then selected areas clear of this fire. Consequently the 2nd Division had only to assemble at the front-line area its four battalions for the first two objectives (25th and 20th, and 27th and 18th). A safe lying-up position for another battalion, however, was found by the 7th Brigade on Westhoek Ridge, and Wisdom decided to place there a battalion (28th) for the third objective. The 26th and 17th would lie in positions, apparently equally shell-free, behind Bellewaarde Lake and on Bellewaarde Ridge.

By September 18th the attacking brigades had brought their last battalions, generally in the order in which they would be engaged, to within easy march of the front line.<sup>41</sup> On September 19th, by order of General Plumer, all participating troops were given, if possible, a few hours' rest, and after dark that night the approach march to the jumping-off tapes began. To keep the columns clear of the nightly stream of wheeled traffic on the Menin road, four tracks, mainly leading across country, had been prepared, one for each brigade, three passing south of Ypres, the fourth through the Menin Gate.<sup>42</sup> Since September 15th the approaches and the front line had been thoroughly reconnoitred by the officers,<sup>43</sup> and the incoming troops knew their tasks as they had never known



<sup>40</sup> Thrown in answer to the practice barrages.

<sup>41</sup> The support battalions had moved to Zillebeke Bund, Halfway House, "Y" Wood, and the ramparts of Ypres, and the rearmost to Chateau Segard (near Dickebusch) and to the western edge of Ypres.

<sup>42</sup> This part of the road belonged to the 9th Division, but, by its permission, was used by one battalion of the 5th Brigade, the 18th. The 17th went by the 7th Brigade track round the south of Ypres.

<sup>43</sup> Some were caught in the barrages that constantly fell at Clapham Junction, and Lieutenant V. L. Bovell (of Busselton, W. Aust.), 12th Battalion, attempting to push through a barrage there, was killed.



35. AUSTRALIANS RESTING BESIDE THE RAMPARTS AT YPRES BEFORE THE APPROACH MARCH ON  
19TH SEPTEMBER, 1917

*Aust War Memorial Official Photo No E4607*

*To face p 752*



36. BELLEVAUDE LAKE, SEEN FROM THE SITE OF HOOGE CHATEAU, LOOKING NORTHWARD.  
Beyond the battery position (16th Battery) can be seen troops on the plank road, beyond them, Chateau Wood and the lake. Beyond these again can be detected the other branch of the first circuit of plank roads.

*Aust. War Memorial Official Photo No. E4533  
Taken on 11th October, 1917.*

them before, at least in so great an operation.<sup>44</sup> A large model of the battlefield, laid out in a field at Busseboom, had been studied by many of all ranks. Even earlier the 2nd Division had marked out fields in the rest area at Clairmarais to represent the battleground, and the troops had practised the attack there after explanation by their officers. In the 9th and 12th Battalions large maps had been erected in the billets and explained to all the men. In addition to the stream of memoranda and maps, numerous aeroplane photographs had been sent to each battalion. For use in the fight, message forms printed on the back with maps of the ground to be fought over and with useful notes, were distributed to each company. "The men," said an officer of the 17th Battalion afterwards, "knew the theory as well as the officers." For the approach, the track for each brigade was marked with scores of signboards. The tapes, laid by the brigade and battalion intelligence officers and scouts early in the night, mapped out, in some cases, not only the rectangle to be occupied by a battalion, but the space for each company, and tapes extending to the rear led the battalions on to them. Guides—some of them officers—were stationed at any point at which it seemed possible that the troops marching to the assembly might go wrong.

In the I Anzac Corps one item of the plans aroused keen anxiety. The attack was to be at "dawn," but the hour specified for dawn seemed dangerously late. The commanders of the attacking troops had, by Plumer's order, been consulted with the object of determining the time at which a man would be visible at 200 yards. Every Anzac officer referred to urged an early start, fearing detection of the assembly; Birdwood had pressed for an attack at 5.10. The higher command, however, had decided on 5.40.<sup>45</sup>

September 19th had been a perfect day, "clear and windy," as one diary says, "good beyond all hopes." But that night the weather changed. The earlier battalions were already on the tracks to the front when a drizzle set in which presently increased until, about 11 o'clock, steady rain was falling. The surface of the battlefield changed from dust to

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<sup>44</sup> The 3rd Division, however, was even more minutely prepared before Messines.

<sup>45</sup> Possibly because fighting tanks were co-operating, though not with I Anzac. In Brigadier-General Wisdom's opinion, at 5.10 a man would be visible 150 yards away. Brigadier-General Smith held that at 5.20 a man would be seen at 200 yards, if moving; he recommended 5.10 for the start.

mud. The infantry tracks, where not duckboarded, became slippery and the going heavy; some units awaiting their turn to start became wet through. Great anxiety fell upon all commanders, and about 11 o'clock the vital question was raised<sup>46</sup> whether the operation should not be postponed. Birdwood, on being referred to at 11.30, consulted General Walker (1st Division) by telephone. "Very difficult to form an opinion," says the 1st Divisional diary. "Conditions not good, but promising better things. Rain decreasing and wind rising. General opinion slightly in favour of continuation." Just before midnight Birdwood telephoned that General Plumer had decided to go on with the attack. By the time this message came through, the rain had almost ceased, and a brisk breeze was blowing. An onlooker at Hooze crater noted:

12.10 a.m. The rain has stopped but it is very muddy.

2.10. The 12th Battalion is passing now, rather late.

Although the sky remained overcast, the rain did not recur. The march had continued steadily through it, and, to onlookers, the manifest confidence of the strong figures constantly passing, and the unhindered movement of diverse preparation along the Menin road, were highly reassuring.

Important mistakes did occur, chiefly in consequence of the rain and the shelling of the back area with gas. Part of the 7th Brigade strayed, for a time, on to the 3rd Brigade's track, and at one point the head of the 5th Battalion also went wrong<sup>47</sup>. But the clear marking of tracks and other careful preparation allowed these mistakes to be quickly

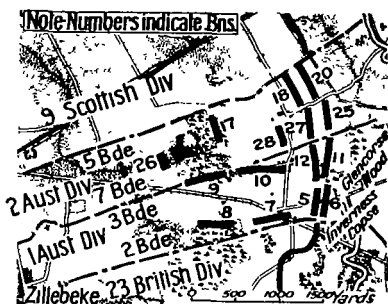
<sup>46</sup> Gough wished to stop the attack, but the decision lay with Plumer. Plumer consulted his corps commanders, and, as there was some doubt, several divisional commanders also. The meteorological staff told him the rain was unlikely to continue.

<sup>47</sup> Half way between the Birr-Cross Road and Hooze, the approach tracks for the 3rd Brigade (1st Division) and the 7th Brigade (2nd Division) ran close together. The Germans were shelling this favourite target on the Menin road with gas-shell, and, despite all precautions, in the intense dark, the rain, and the shell-fire, the 28th Battalion (7th Brigade) got on to the 3rd Brigade's track, holding up for 35 minutes the 12th Battalion and those following it. About the same time on the southernmost track, the headquarters of the 5th Battalion (2nd Brigade) as it neared the ridge mistook a wide tape for the one leading to its jumping-off line. A few minutes later, however, it was ascertained from three tanks, which were crawling along the tape, that this had been laid by the X Corps tanks towards Stirling Castle. Fortunately the companies of the 5th followed the proper route, and headquarters joined them as they reached the assembly position. On the Zillebeke flats some of the later units, including the machine-guns to accompany the 5th Battalion, were caught in a German gas-bombardment directed at the battery areas, and, having to wear their masks and carry heavy loads, lost touch and strayed to the X Corps area at Stirling Castle. Only half-an-hour remained before the start, and most of these guns were thus late; but one young officer, Lieutenant J. J. Bourke (Edi, Vic.), by advancing with the X Corps and taking his two guns diagonally across to the left, rejoined the 5th early in the battle.



corrected; and, although the pace of the approach averaged only  $1\frac{1}{4}$  miles an hour, the smooth running of the arrangements impressed everyone. The one anxiety was now to complete the assembly without detection. The front tapes were only 150 yards from the nearest enemy posts.<sup>48</sup> The assembly of the forward battalions of the 2nd Division was completed by 4.15. That of the 1st Division was then only half-finished, but was being carried out so silently that most officers were certain that it was not detected by sound,<sup>49</sup> nor, apparently, were the troops seen by the light of flares thrown by the German posts in Glencorse Wood, for, though the assembly continued in the flare-light, no shots were fired at it.<sup>50</sup> A more dangerous illumination was that of German incendiary shells, occasionally fired into the back area, lighting up arcs of the horizon so that nearer objects were darkly silhouetted. About 3.50 a moderate barrage fell on the edge and rear slope of the ridge, but this had happened on previous mornings, and was evidently only general preparation against attack.<sup>51</sup> Coloured flares, alarm signals from the German infantry, were constantly fired on this and previous nights, and might be merely a sign of nervousness.

But at 4.30, after a coloured flare had risen from Glencorse Wood, the barrage there became much heavier. The foremost battalion (11th) of the 3rd Brigade, already lying out, escaped with comparatively slight



<sup>48</sup> General Smyth (2nd Division), after a personal visit to the front, had decided that at this distance the enemy might detect the assembly, and had therefore ordered that the first wave should be formed up 50 yards further back. This was arranged, but shortly before the assembly two German posts were discovered to be closer than was previously realised, one within 150 yards of the 7th Brigade.

<sup>49</sup> The silence of the movement is referred to in report after report by officers present. The one exception is a note by the 12th Battalion that while the 11th, in front of it, was moving into position "there was a lot of low whistling, evidently for communication."

<sup>50</sup> At 2.30, during the forming up of the 6th Battalion, Lieutenant P. L. Rauert, moving behind its lines, found and captured a German soldier. This was an elderly man who evidently had lost his way. He would give no information.

<sup>51</sup> The 69th British Brigade, assembling on the edge of Inverness Copse, was caught by this, and the 11th West Yorkshire Regiment, on the right of the 6th Australian Battalion, suffered 50 casualties.

casualties.<sup>52</sup> The 12th Battalion, behind it, pressed forward and to the left to avoid the barrage, but the 3rd Machine Gun Company, which had just come up behind the 12th,<sup>53</sup> and the 9th and 10th Battalions, which were just arriving through Chateau Wood, were fully caught and suffered heavy loss. The 9th lost all its company commanders<sup>54</sup> and half its junior officers, and seemed almost hopelessly split up. Its carrying company dropped many loads, but, under the leadership of Lieutenant Meyers<sup>55</sup> and a handful of juniors, all the scattered elements struggled through to the tapes. The two rear companies of the 10th—carriers and “moppers-up” respectively—were plunged in confusion, but with the help of the adjutant, Captain Cornish,<sup>56</sup> sent back by Colonel Neligan to reorganise them, and of Captain Henwood, they also came through. On reaching their tapes the rear battalions of this brigade still lay fairly under the bombardment, and pressed forward to clear it.

News of the bombardment reached the artillery, the counter-batteries were turned on, and at 5.15 the bombardment eased, but five minutes later it came down again—“a persistent, heavy barrage,” as Neligan describes it—this time extending southwards to the front between Glencorse Wood and Inverness Copse. Here the last companies of the 2nd Brigade’s last battalion, the 8th, just arriving at Clapham Junction, ran straight into the shell-fire.<sup>57</sup> Some disturbance, including machine-gun fire, now broke out on the right where the northernmost brigade (69th Brigade, 23rd Division) of the X Corps was assembling. Although the shelling had extended to part of the 2nd Division’s front on

<sup>52</sup> These were nevertheless its heaviest in this battle.

<sup>53</sup> Lieut. F. P. Bethune (of Hamilton district, Tas.), then in charge, had realized that the company lay in the German barrage area, and had already passed the order to edge forward. Commands, however, could only be whispered, and few men had moved when the barrage fell. (Bethune was the clergyman who delivered the sermon quoted on p. 70, *Vol. III.*)

<sup>54</sup> Captain C. J. Carroll (of South Brisbane) was wounded three times in Chateau Wood, Lieutenant F. B. Scougall (of Brisbane) killed near the tapes, and Captain J. F. McNaught (of Toowong, Q’land) hit in the head in Chateau Wood.

<sup>55</sup> Lieut. E. H. W. Meyers, M.C.; 9th Bn. Bank Clerk; of Ipswich, Q’land; b Cairns, Q’land, 18 Dec., 1896.

<sup>56</sup> Capt. W. G. Cornish, M.C.; 10th Bn. Warehouseman; of Kent Town, S. Aust., b Maylands, S. Aust., 9 Feb., 1893. Died 30 May, 1936.

<sup>57</sup> One of the company commanders, Captain D. G. Evans (of Redcamp, Moyhu, Vic.), was badly wounded. He refused to let the stretcher-bearers delay the assembly by picking him up. They went back for him later, but he died of his wounds.

Westhoek Ridge, the 7th Brigade's battalions, in their excellently chosen positions, escaped with few casualties.<sup>58</sup>

The eastern horizon was now tinged with red. At 5.36 brilliant spangled flares broke out opposite the centre of the corps front, and a minute later the German field-guns began to come into action on the front of the northern (5th) brigade of the 2nd Division also. It was evident that something had been discovered by the enemy. As only three minutes now remained before the start, Captain Barlow<sup>59</sup> of the 5th Brigade's leading battalion (20th) at once jumped out, blew his whistle, and led the line forward out of the barrage area. His example was imitated by his colleagues, and by the 18th Battalion in rear. Only the tail of the 18th was caught; and at 5.40, to the intense relief of all the attacking troops, the whole of the British artillery and machine-guns, breaking in with the suddenness of a great orchestra, gave the signal for the attack to start. The dimly-appearing battlefield ahead became screened again, with churning shell-smoke. The rest of the waiting lines rose; almost every man lit a much longed-for cigarette; and then the whole force moved forward close to the barrage cloud which, to allow of this, lay stationary for three minutes. The few German posts that were known to exist short of it were sharply shelled for a few moments at "zero" hour by Stokes mortars.<sup>60</sup> The two Australian divisions, together with four British ones on their right and five on their left—eleven on an eight-mile front, from the IX Corps sector at the Ypres-Comines canal to the centre of the Fifth Army's northern corps (XIV) on the Ypres-Staden railway—moved forward.

The veil may at this stage be lifted from certain interesting circumstances on the German side.

The diary of Crown Prince Rupprecht shows that he and his staff were puzzled by the lull in the first fortnight of September. "The

<sup>58</sup> Captain J. D. Elder, 27th Battalion, was hit, but carried on to the second objective, when Lieutenant J. O. Julge (Southwark, S. Aust.) took charge of his company. Some casualties had been suffered in the approach march. Lieutenant C. G. Walsh (Devonport West, Tas.), 28th Battalion, had been mortally wounded in a barrage in Chateau Wood on the way up. In the 18th Battalion a single shell, which fell at Birr Cross-Road, killed 3 men and wounded 19.

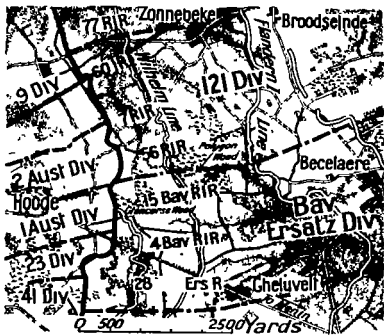
<sup>59</sup> Capt. H. B. D. Barlow, M.C.; 20th Bn. Dairy instructor, Hawkesbury Agricultural College, Richmond, N.S.W.; b. Tumut, N.S.W., 8 Aug., 1887.

<sup>60</sup> In Glencorse Wood this shelling was carried out by the 1st Brigade's mortars, as they were already in position before the attacking brigades came in. At Westhoek "Varley" smoke-bombs were to be used by the 7th Brigade's mortars, if it was desirable to raise a smoke screen. Twenty were fired, but the ordinary shell-smoke and dust were so thick that a special screen was not required.

Flanders fight seems actually to have ended," he noted on the 12th. "We can consider pulling out several divisions." His chief-of-staff, von Kuhl, records that, while it was hard to believe that the "stubborn English" had given up the attack, reports came in which pointed to their having decided to transfer it to another sector. Consequently, when the Second British Army's bombardment began, on September 15, Prince Rupprecht notes that it was "probably only for demonstration." On the 18th he infers that the heavy bombardment upon the main ridge probably means that the British intend to secure the Zonnebeke terrace before winter sets in. The historian of the 60th I.R., which held the line in front of Zonnebeke, declares that, in spite of warnings from its brigade, guns were on September 18 transferred from the Ypres sector to meet a British offensive expected elsewhere on the army front. According to a note in Prince Rupprecht's diary, he actually supposed the Australian divisions to be in course of transfer to Egypt.<sup>61</sup>

The German front-line troops, on the other hand, and the responsible staffs, as high, apparently, as that of the Fourth Army, were by September 17 convinced that an attack at Ypres was imminent.<sup>62</sup> September 20th seems to have been indicated by a spy and by prisoners as the probable date, but the British practice of laying down varying barrages at different hours and places, followed by no attack, had its intended effect—to befog the Germans as to the hour of the real attack. They also expected that it would be preceded by an intense bombardment lasting, possibly, for several hours.<sup>63</sup>

Uncertainty disappeared when, in the early hours of September 20, there was brought to the headquarters of the 241st German Infantry Brigade,<sup>64</sup> opposite the 2nd Australian Division, an Australian officer just captured by the southern regiment of the 121st Division, the 56th R.I.R. On his being searched, there was found upon him an operation order for the attack.<sup>65</sup> This disclosed (says the German report made at the time) "that about two Australian divisions are to attack on either side of the Ypres-Menin road and about one kilometre south of the Ypres-Roulers railway. The date of the attack not definitely to be ascertained, but apparently for to-day."



<sup>61</sup> "Sept. 6. For a long time past we have supposed that the Australian divisions would be transferred—at least in part—to some other theatre, and now we read confirmation of the transferring of the 1st Australian Division to Egypt." The British, he added, would still have strength for their attacks in Flanders.

<sup>62</sup> The German Official History (Vol. 27, p. 116) says that from this date the attack was expected.

<sup>63</sup> The Ypres Group on Sept. 19 warned its infantry that the sign of a real attack would be the advance of the barrage. But the practice barrages also advanced.

<sup>64</sup> Commanding the infantry of the 121st Division.

<sup>65</sup> He belonged to the 7th Machine Gun Company. He had been ordered to assemble his section at the outpost-line. Going forward to find this position, he was wrongly directed and ran into a German patrol, which in a rough-and-tumble fight managed to seize him. While being taken to the rear he tried to destroy his papers, but parts of them must have remained decipherable.

It was then 3 o'clock. The front about to be attacked by two Australian divisions was held by parts of two German divisions belonging to separate corps. Facing the 2nd Australian Division were the two southern regiments (7th and 56th R.I.R.) of the 121st (Prussian) Division, the southernmost of the Ypres Group (Guard Corps); facing the 1st Australian Division were the two northern regiments of the Bavarian Ersatz Division, belonging to the Wytschaete Group (IX Reserve Corps). Each of these divisions required relief, having been in the line for several weeks; but their artillery was, so far as British G.H.Q. was aware, the highest allotment found on the British front in 1917, though probably only a third of the strength of that opposed to it.<sup>66</sup> The 121st Division now at once informed its artillery of the captured order, and directed it to lay "annihilation" fire on its front. A general warning was sent out by wireless. Headquarters of the Ypres Group hurriedly telephoned to all its other line divisions, and ordered out the counter-attack divisions. The Wytschaete Group was informed and took similar action. The 121st Division afterwards reported that its artillery had methodically bombarded all enemy approaches, rear lines, battery nests, and strong-points, and had dealt with "lively movement" seen in and just behind the Australian line. The historian of its divisional artillery says that at 5.30 "annihilation fire" was laid on the assembly points for the impending attack.

From this it seems possible that only the barrage that fell on the 2nd Division at 5.36 is attributable to the discovery of the operation order, and that the fire upon the 1st Division was at first due to ordinary precaution,<sup>67</sup> and later, perhaps, to S.O.S. signals and to the delivery of a *flammenwerfer* attack by the 4th Bavarian I.R. on "Cryer Farm." The historian of the 60th I.R. is justified in saying that the discovery was too late for the taking of "effective artillery counter-measures." At the same time it enabled the counter-attack forces to be warned; so that if ever Ludendorff's system of defence by counter-attack was to have a fair trial, it should have had one this day.

In happy ignorance of the enemy's discovery and consequent preparations—but certain that a formidable counter-

attack had to be met at some stage—the British line went forward. This was the first occasion on which two Australian divisions had attacked side by side. British commanders at first seemed almost unwilling to recognise that any advantage could be drawn

<sup>66</sup> The 121st Division on the northern side of the main ridge, had 76 field guns and howitzers, of which probably 50 would oppose the 2nd Australian Division (which was supported by 96 similar pieces). The 121st Division had also about 60 heavy pieces (17 batteries). How many more in this sector were controlled by the corps is not known. The Bavarian Ersatz Division had on Sept. 1st 84 field-pieces and about 46 heavy (13 batteries). Against about half of the front thus protected, the I Anzac Corps brought 216 field-pieces and 208 heavy.

<sup>67</sup> The Wytschaete corps, holding the front from Glencorse Wood southwards, had learned from prisoners that in the impending attack the British would rely more even than before upon preliminary bombardment, and had therefore on Sept. 19 ordered its artillery to adopt a policy of concentrating its fire on the British artillery. The gassing of battery areas and approaches delayed the Australian infantry, and the "annihilation fire" thus caught during the approach march some battalions which might otherwise have assembled earlier and escaped it.

from such a circumstance, but it would be difficult to exaggerate the satisfaction which it occasioned to the Australian troops. Not only was their confidence in the men beside them complete, but keenness for their country's reputation, and friendly rivalry between local units, spurred their effort. Men of the 25th (Queensland) Battalion, for example, determined that those of the 9th—the oldest Queensland unit, which was near them<sup>68</sup>—should be, if possible, outstripped. Again, the field artillery of the comparatively new 3rd Division, supporting the infantry of the veteran 1st, was keyed to the highest pitch of endeavour. In view of the marked friendship of the Australians and the Scots, another favourable circumstance lay in the fact that the division of the V Corps<sup>69</sup> (Fifth Army) on the immediate left of the Australians was a Scottish one, the 9th, which included also the famous South African Brigade.

The German barrage was already falling when the Anzac lines moved forward, and it merely intensified for twenty-five minutes, and then suddenly died down, possibly through the tremendous fire of the British counter-batteries. Part of the Australian attacking force had already suffered heavily.<sup>70</sup> Along the whole Anzac front this shelling, combined with the eagerness of the troops, had one marked result—to cause the rear lines to press forward in order to clear the barrage area. As their own barrage advanced but slowly, they quickly caught up the lines ahead. The intention as to formation was that in each line only the leading platoons (and in most of the rear battalions not even these) should be extended to act as a screen, which would hang close on the edge of the barrage. The bulk of the force, wave after wave, would advance in lines of sections in file, hundreds of little columns, each consisting of an N.C.O. followed by seven or eight men, a formation sometimes known as "worm columns."<sup>71</sup> But

<sup>68</sup> In the first stage, owing to the 9th being forced forward by the shelling, their flanks touched.

<sup>69</sup> The V Corps replaced the XIX on Sept. 7.

<sup>70</sup> The 3rd Machine Gun Company lost about half its strength, including its commander, Captain L. Ghent, killed. He had visited 3rd Brigade H.Q. on the way to the tapes, and was walking up to rejoin the company when killed by a shell. He was of Brunswick, Vic. (*see Vol. I, p. 388*). Among those killed at this stage in the 12th Battalion was Lieutenant M. McL. Allan (of Perth, W. Aust.).

<sup>71</sup> This formation was thought best for passing boggy areas, and for meeting small centres of opposition. In the 1st Division each battalion attacked with two companies in front, the third following to "mop-up," and the fourth in rear, carrying ammunition, tools, and barbed-wire. For the 2nd Division, General Smyth preferred a four-company front, each company keeping its four platoons in depth, the rear platoons "mopping-up" and carrying.

the shelling caused the whole force in the first stage to press forward in one line. As the 1st Division had all eight attacking battalions forward, its front line now became dense, and only the closeness of this eager crowd to the barrage prevented it from being disastrously shot about.

The battle of September 20th (Menin Road), like those that succeeded it, is easily described inasmuch as it went almost precisely in accordance with plan. The advancing barrage won the ground; the infantry merely occupied it, pouncing on any points at which resistance survived. Whereas the artillery was generally spoken of as supporting the infantry, in this battle the infantry were little more than a necessary adjunct to the artillery's effort. The barrage was the densest that had ever yet covered Australian troops. "Excellent—the best ever put up," "as near to perfect as possible," "magnificent in accuracy and volume," were descriptions applied to it afterwards by Australian officers. Nevertheless it may fairly be claimed that infantry such as the Australian gave the artillery the best prospect of success. Provided the going was good, the difficulty was, never, to keep Australians up to the barrage, but, almost always, to keep them out of it. With guns so concentrated, a fair proportion of shells inevitably burst short of the rest, making a fringe to the barrage, and in this fringe the Australian infantry worked.

As matters turned out, the degree of daylight at the start was precisely that required for the operation, its brightness being dimmed by the mist following the rain. German posts were detected almost at once through the thinning edge of the dust-fog, and were promptly bombed.

Away along the hillside to the north as far as the eye could see (wrote an onlooker)<sup>72</sup> were little groups of men steadily advancing in artillery formation, while further in front small single figures scurried hither and thither, and the little white bursts of bombs showed where some German machine-gun nest was being rooted out.

Pillboxes were scattered thickly over the whole battlefield and as each one showed up through the barrage-cloud, the advancing line made for it, expecting resistance especially at those places which the intelligence staff had indicated as likely to be strongly occupied. The Germans, however, seemed

<sup>72</sup> Lieutenant K. H. McConnel (of Brisbane), 1st Battalion, whose company, still holding the outposts, had screened the assembly of the 1st Division's attack.

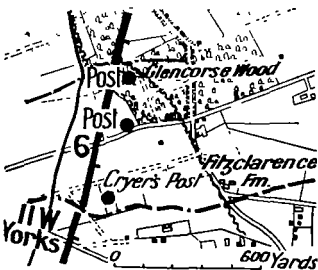
to have been dazed by the bombardment, and, although some were in almost every pillbox, in comparatively few cases did the Australians, arriving with the barrage, find them preparing to resist. Some even came out to meet their captors, waving white handkerchiefs or bandages. The actual fighting took the shape of a number of little combats to suppress the small quota—particularly machine-gunners—that did resist. At the very outset the right of the Anzac line passed over a disabled *flammenwerfer* apparatus and a machine-gun with their German crews lying dead around them. It was not known until afterwards that these were the remaining signs of a dangerous *flammenwerfer* attack that had been made against the 1st Battalion's covering post at Cryer's Farm, only twenty-five minutes before the start of the offensive; and that, but for the staunchness of its Sergeant,<sup>73</sup> and the promptness of Lieutenant Green<sup>74</sup> of the assembling 6th, this machine-gun might have caused great trouble on the southern boundary of I Anzac.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>73</sup> Sgt. (later C.Q.M.S.) H. A. Flatman (No. 5091; 1st Bn.). Shipping clerk; of Kogarah, N.S.W., b. Plaistow, Essex, Eng., 8 April, 1892.

<sup>74</sup> Lieut. R. F. H. Green, 6th Bn. Assistant stock inspector; of Armidale, N.S.W.; M.H.R. for Richmond since 1922; b. Emmaville, N.S.W., 29 Oct., 1885.

<sup>75</sup> The 1st Brigade, though relieved elsewhere when the attacking brigades took over the line on the night of Sept. 18, had, for convenience, continued to garrison this and other advanced posts in the 1st Division's sector. The garrisons were to have been withdrawn at 5.10, when the assembly of the attacking brigades was to be complete; but, at 5.25, a sergeant and three singed and blackened men of the 1st Battalion from the ditch at Cryer's Farm came in to the flank of the 6th Battalion, and reported to Lieut. Green that the Germans had attacked that post with a *flammenwerfer*, and had been beaten off, but had established a machine-gun 15 yards away. It was afterwards learned that, while the tongue of flame roared over some of the crouching men, two others, Privates D. Funnell (Darlington, N.S.W.) and F. E. Sneeby (West Tamworth, N.S.W.) shot the German carrier. But the active machine-gun, which would be untouched by the barrage, had remained a danger to the attack, and Green, with his bomber, L/Cpl. Knight, and Sergeant Flatman, had hurried towards it. The gun was then firing short bursts at the British assembling near by. From the post Green and the lance-corporal bombed it, and then rushed the position. The crew, killed by a grenade, lay dead around the gun, and Green and Knight hurried back to their battalion.

The removal of this dangerous obstacle had only been rendered possible by the fact that the subaltern of the 1st Battalion in command of Cryer's Post, Lieut. S. Ward (Coolamon, N.S.W.), hearing movement in front throughout the night, had taken the bold precaution of keeping his platoon forward to cover the assembly, in spite of orders to avoid the British barrage by withdrawing at 5 o'clock. Thus, through his initiative, the sentry group was still in the ditch at 5.20 when the Germans attacked. Ward was killed soon afterwards. Farther south, in the X Corps area at Inverness Copse, a German machine-gun continued to fire and inflict casualties for some time after the attack had gone forward.





In the first stage the points at which the chief resistance was expected were—in the 1st Division's sector, at a deeply sunken road at the northern edge of Glencorse Wood; in the 2nd Division's, at the broken scrub along the Hannebeek swamp.<sup>76</sup> It was also anticipated that the troops would be hampered by three natural obstacles—the débris of Glencorse Wood,<sup>77</sup> and, farther north, the bogs at the Nonne Bosschen copse<sup>78</sup> and along the Hannebeek. The débris of the wood, however, was found to offer no impediment. From two or three of many pillboxes near its southern edge a few bombs were thrown or hasty shots fired, but the Australians were immediately around or beyond most of them, and they surrendered.<sup>79</sup>



From one a machine-gun fired, and for a moment checked the advance of the 6th Battalion. But Lieutenant Birks<sup>80</sup> and Corporal Johnston<sup>81</sup> instantly rushed at the place. They were met with bombs and Johnston was badly wounded, but Birks reached the rear of the pillbox and the garrison, seeing the rest of the line advancing, surrendered.<sup>82</sup> At Fitzclarence

<sup>76</sup> See Vol. XII, plate 371.

<sup>77</sup> The difficulty of getting through the shattered woods had impressed a committee, of which General White was a member, inquiring into the difficulties that had met the II Corps.

<sup>78</sup> See Vol. XII, plate 372.

<sup>79</sup> Lieutenants W. A. Kelly (6th Bn.) and H. L. Rintel (8th Bn.) were killed during this advance. (Kelly belonged to Ivanhoe, Vic.; Rintel to Warragul, Vic.)

<sup>80</sup> Lieut. F. Birks, V.C., M.M.; 6th Bn. Waite; of Melbourne; b. Buckley, Flintshire, North Wales, 31 Aug., 1894. Killed in action, 21 Sept., 1917. For his bravery Birks was awarded the Victoria Cross.

<sup>81</sup> Cpl. W. Johnston, M.M. (No. 1981; 6th Bn.). Springfield's improver; of North Melbourne, b. North Melbourne, 12 Feb., 1894.

<sup>82</sup> A few Germans had been missed even by the 2nd Brigade's dense front line. Lieutenant I. G. Murdoch (Camberwell and Shepparton district, Vic.), for example, of the 8th, trudging with his platoon behind the 6th and 7th, was passing a pillbox, strangely shaped like a sugarloaf, when a bomb burst at his feet, and he realised that the place was held. He set men to shoot at the loop-hole, from which a machine-gun was firing, while Lieutenant R. B. Glanville (Timaru district, N.Z.; killed on 4 Oct., 1917) worked round to the entrance of the block-house. Nine Germans appeared from the place. They were Glanville's prisoners, but the troops were unaware of this and, in hot blood, shot them all.

Farm there was a short tussle, but, while some of the Victorians fired at the loop-holes, others worked to the rear, and forty Germans under an officer surrendered.

At the deep sunken road at the northern edge of the wood German machine-gunners also managed to establish a light machine-gun on the roof of a pillbox, and, sweeping the front, temporarily held up the advance of the 11th Battalion. Five minutes of fierce fighting followed, the Western Australians closing on the place, and revolvers and bombs coming into use on both sides. Partly mingled with the 11th Battalion was the 10th,<sup>83</sup> now commanded by Colonel Wilder-Neligan, gay, wild young Englishman, clever soldier, and inevitably a leader wherever he was. Neligan had specially trained the 10th for this action, organising it into two picked "storm companies" and two of carriers,<sup>84</sup> and at this juncture, seeing the hitch, he sent Lieutenant Leaver<sup>85</sup> with one of the crack platoons to get round the place. Leaver reached a position behind the pillbox, and was within a few yards of the machine-gun when one of the enemy with a revolver shot him through the head. The men (as Neligan afterwards stated) "went mad." A corporal of the 11th named Hodge<sup>86</sup> rushed forward, shot the machine-gunner, and overturned the gun. As the Australians swarmed into the road the Germans tried to surrender, but the excited troops "filled the place with bombs" until, growing tired of killing, they allowed a remnant—an officer<sup>87</sup> and 40 men—to go to the rear as prisoners.

Officers hurried the leading troops forward to catch up the barrage, leaving the clearing of the sunken road and its pillboxes to the "mopping-up" companies. On the left, where most of the 12th Battalion and some of the 2nd

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<sup>83</sup> The 10th was really the third-line battalion, but the 12th (second-line) had drawn to the left in consequence of the shelling at the start. A few of its men, however, were in the crowd attacking this strong-point.

<sup>84</sup> Every other battalion had its rearmost waves carrying for it, an arrangement which worked badly in this battle, it being impossible to prevent the carrying waves from joining in the fight. On the other hand the system by which each Red and Blue Line battalion carried from dumps in its line to replenish dumps in the line ahead of it proved a good one.

<sup>85</sup> Lieut. G. H. Leaver, 10th Bn. University student (mining engineering); of Burnside, S. Aust.; b. Walkerville, S. Aust., 6 Sept., 1896. Killed in action, 20 Sept., 1917.

<sup>86</sup> Cpl. H. Hodge, D.C.M. (No. 1357; 11th Bn.). Railway ganger; of Sandstone, W. Aust.; b. Victoria, British Columbia, 26 Nov., 1884.

<sup>87</sup> The German officer commanding the post surrendered to Lieutenant P. E. M. Vowels (of Perth, W. Aust.), 11th Bn. Vowels was killed in action on 11 May, 1918.

Division swelled the crowd, the slough at Nonne Bosschen was found to be fairly passable by walking along the rims of the waterlogged shell-craters.<sup>88</sup> Lieutenant Fordham<sup>89</sup> of the 11th was shot as he was about to enter a blockhouse, and a machine-gun tore a gap in the crowded line, but the resistance almost immediately gave way. The first halt (the Red Line) was just east of this scrub and of Glencorse Wood, and the sign for it (as subsequently for the second and third halts) was given by the field-guns each firing one smoke-shell when beginning the protective barrage.<sup>90</sup>

The 2nd Division met even less resistance than the 1st. Groups of Germans, come upon in odd shell-holes as soon as the advance began, mostly surrendered without a shot. The left battalion (20th, New South Wales), passing through the remains of a hedge, found about a platoon of them scrambling to their feet from shell-holes behind it. The Germans had bayonets fixed, but seemed too surprised to use them,<sup>91</sup> and were killed. Machine-gunners at a couple of pillboxes held up for several minutes the right of the 20th, but the fight there ended as soon as the 20th worked up to within bombing distance.<sup>92</sup> The next obstacle was the Hannebeek swamp, 100 yards wide. A few men became bogged and had to be helped out. "The beauty of the slow barrage," reported Captain Henwood of the 10th, "was that it was possible to pick a way through the bad marshy country." The right battalion (25th, Queensland) and the right of the 20th went straight through the swamp. One or two machine-guns could be seen flashing from loop-holed pillboxes while the barrage was still on them. In some cases Lewis gunners, firing from the hip, enabled the bombers to reach these places before the Germans emerged. The objective, just beyond the swamp, was here reached without serious fighting.

The left of the 20th met more resistance. Near the start it rushed a line of old concrete artillery shelters just as the

<sup>88</sup> One pillbox, intended to be occupied by Lieutenant B C Lehmann of the 3rd Machine Gun Company, was found to be unapproachable through flooding.

<sup>89</sup> Lieut E S W Fordham, 11th Bn. Surveyor and draughtsman; of North Perth, W. Aust.; b. Richmond, Vic., 29 March, 1889. Killed in action, 20 Sept., 1917.

<sup>90</sup> The smoke-shell burst with a pure white cloud. The sign was a good one, but the white smoke or steam that often accompanied ordinary shell-bursts was sometimes confusing.

<sup>91</sup> Except one German, who was killed in a thrust-and-parry fight with an Australian

<sup>92</sup> One crew was killed with a bomb, the other tried to retire and was shot down.

garrison was emerging.<sup>93</sup> Here, as in so many pillbox fights, confusion, fatal for the garrison, occurred through the weaker spirits being ready to surrender while some brave men continued to fire. As the first German came out with his hands up, another behind fired between his legs and wounded a sergeant of the 20th. "Get out of the way, sergeant," shouted a Lewis gunner, "I'll see to the bastards," and firing three or four bursts into the entrance he killed or wounded most of the crowd inside. In this sector the Hannebeek Wood was so flooded that Captain Barlow, like the Scots on his left, led his men round it. Several German machine-guns thus had time to open. Some were rushed,<sup>94</sup> under the reckless leadership of Sergeant Poole.<sup>95</sup> Two more being heard in rear, a party was sent back under Lieutenant Cameron,<sup>96</sup> who found and suppressed them. Another machine-gun, which had been missed, fired from behind a pillbox into the rear of the 20th, but was rushed by Lieutenant Duncan<sup>97</sup> and some of the 18th who were following.<sup>98</sup>



Between 5.57 and 6.00 everywhere on the Anzac front the first objective was reached, as it was along the whole line of the British offensive, in precise accordance with time-table.

<sup>93</sup> Near one of these a German machine-gun crew had stubbornly attempted during the barrage to fire on the Scots, further north, but had been killed by a shell.

<sup>94</sup> The 20th Battalion captured 16 machine-guns.

<sup>95</sup> Sgt. D. Poole D C M (No 1422; 20th Bn.). Seaman; of Kensington, N.S.W.; b. St. Peter's, near Birkenhead, Eng., 21 April, 1882.

<sup>96</sup> Lieut. G. C. Cameron, M.C., 20th Bn. Bank clerk; of Mosman, N.S.W.; b. Mossiel, N S W, 14 Feb., 1887.

<sup>97</sup> Lieut. G. H. Duncan, 18th Bn. Process engraver; of Randwick, N.S.W.; b. Randwick, 23 Oct., 1890. Died of wounds, 9 Aug., 1918.

<sup>98</sup> Three of Duncan's party were killed. The fighting here was sharp; the 20th lost Major A. K. Hosking and Lieutenants R. S. Evatt and F. S. Edgington killed, and Captain A. R. Bolton-Wood mortally wounded. Captain J. A. Broadbent and Lieutenants D. H. Anthon and L. K. G. Browning though wounded, continued to lead. Lieutenant M. D. Healy, 25th Battalion, also was killed after reaching the objective. (Hosking belonged to Wollongong, N.S.W.; Evatt to Milson's Point, N S W.; Edgington to Woolwich, N.S.W.; Bolton-Wood to Dulwich Hill, N S.W.; Broadbent to Greenwich, N S W; Anthon to Petersham, N.S.W.; Browning to Auburn and Rhodes, N S W. Healy to Wellington, N Z, and Sydney.)

<sup>99</sup> The time, of course, depended upon the distance to be travelled, the Red Line, like the Blue (second objective) and Green (third objective), not being straight, but following to some extent the contours of the terrain. Parts of the Fifth Army made the advance in two, instead of three, stages, and the right (IX) corps of the Second Army had no third objective.

Fitzclarence Farm, Glencorse Wood, Nonne Bosschen—scenes of dreadful struggle in the previous phases of the battle—had at last been easily secured.

All the German regiments on the Anzac front had been warned to expect attack; but all assumed that it would be preceded by several hours of intense bombardment. The British "neutralising" fire, mostly gas shell, on the German artillery positions did not answer this description, although the 121st Division had 411 men gassed, mostly slight cases, during the night of the 19th. The appearance of the British infantry on the heels of the first shells was therefore, according to captured Germans, a complete surprise.

But only the front-line companies—about three in each regiment—had so far been affected. Behind them, the Germans still had ample forces. In the 121st Division, each regiment had two companies in the main line of resistance, the Wilhelm Line, with three more close behind them and four in reserve behind the main ridge. The dispositions of the Bavarian Ersatz Division were presumably similar. Behind these line divisions were the counter-attack divisions, the 234th and 236th behind the Ypres Group, and the 15th Bavarian behind the Wytshaete Group. In addition the 50th (Prussian) Reserve Division (the same that had faced the Australians at Armentières on their first arrival in France) was being moved down from the northern part of the Ypres area; and the 3rd Reserve Division (whose place the 236th had just taken) was available for the Wytshaete Group, if required. The three counter-attack divisions each had three battalions standing ready, with batteries of artillery attached. As soon as the direction of the British penetration was known, these would be thrown in. The local command had no anxiety as to the sufficiency of its reserves.

To return to the Australian line. The necessity for the pause for reorganisation was shown by the fact that officers of the *left* brigade of the 2nd Australian Division found among their troops parties of the 1st Division who, in the heavy shelling, had pressed northward. Other parties were thickly intermingled with the 2nd Division's right. These were now directed to their own sectors.<sup>100</sup> While the thin protective barrage covered the digging-in, and the heavy-artillery barrage wandered into the enemy's back area, there occurred in the left (5th Brigade) sub-sector an incident which was to be constantly repeated in this step-by-step fighting. Some 200 yards beyond the Hannebeek, and ahead of the right of the 20th Battalion, lay two loop-holed

<sup>100</sup> The spirit of the troops at this stage may be judged from a characteristic message from Capt. J D Rogers, the young intelligence officer of the 3rd Brigade, to his brigadier (General H G. Bennett). "I have just returned from a tour round the whole of our country and everything is absolutely *très bon*. 9th (Bn.) just a bit disorganised . . . but all right now. They are now getting no machine gun fire from the enemy on the very front line, and will quite easily take the two final objectives and then will have enough men there to hold all the German divisions on the whole front."





37. "ANZAC" PILLBOX PHOTOGRAPHED A WEEK AFTER  
CAPTURE

*Aust War Memorial Official Photo No 2321*



38. "GARTER POINT"

*Aust War Memorial Official Photo No E4737  
Taken on 28th September, 1917*

*To face p 768*



39. PILLBOXES AT NONNE BOSSCHEN

*Aust War Memorial Official Photo No E870  
Taken on 1st October, 1917*

*To face p 769.*



The second stage was even easier than the first. On the front of the right battalion, the 5th (Victoria), the pillboxes<sup>106</sup> mostly surrendered without resistance, their inmates, much shaken by the barrage, coming out waving pieces of white cloth. To the south a blockhouse was firing on the 23rd Division. The 5th helped to outflank this, and soon afterwards reached its objective.<sup>106</sup> The same advance brought the left battalion of the division, the 12th (Tasmania, etc.), to the edge of the famous Polygon "Wood," which was found to be barely recognisable as a wood, the thin stubble of sapling stalks being barely breast high. The Wilhelm Line—now untraceable—ran along its edge, and a good many Germans were in the area; but not one of the nine machine-guns captured by the 12th had been brought into use by the Germans, the crews remaining in pillboxes until made prisoners. Three machine-guns were thus taken from a single pillbox. During this stage a gap occurred in the line owing to the 12th having slipped to the left in consequence of the German barrage at the start. The situation was dangerous, since pillboxes in the gap might have been left behind unsubdued. One was attacked by the 12th's southernmost platoon under Lieutenant Vaughan, Corporal Townsend<sup>107</sup> rushing ahead of his section just in time to keep the Germans suppressed. The 10th Battalion, following for the next stage, bridged the rest of the gap, Lieutenant Klenner<sup>108</sup> capturing a German machine-gun and its crew, who had shot down several men and for the moment caused a check.

In the 2nd Division the 27th (South Australia) Battalion, advancing along the northern slope of the ridge, attacked the next sector of the Wilhelm Line, which contained a number of strong-points.<sup>109</sup> The trench lines had long been shattered beyond recognition, but in the crater-field were a number of pillboxes most of which contained a few sheltering Germans.

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<sup>106</sup> Including one at Verbeek Farm, at which strong resistance was expected.

<sup>106</sup> Lieutenant J. R. Stock (Richmond, Vic.) was killed during this advance.

<sup>107</sup> Cpl. L. G. Townsend (No. 295; 12th Bn.). Farmer; of Ridgley, Tas.; b. Latrobe, Tas., 1889. Killed in action, 20 Sept., 1917.

<sup>108</sup> Lieut. A. G. Klenner, M.C.; 10th Bn. Labourer; of Hindmarsh, S. Aust.; b. Norwood, S. Aust., 22 Feb., 1890.

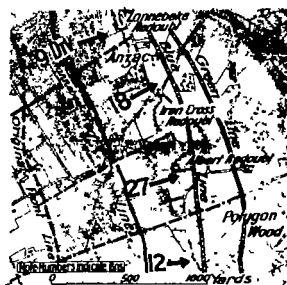
<sup>109</sup> Known to the British as the "Albert," "Iron Cross," "Zonnebeke," and "Bremen" Redoubts—the two last-named on the 9th Division's front.

We struck a good few Huns (wrote Lieutenant C. C. J. McCann<sup>110</sup>) but they were all in concrete dugouts, and only in one position did they open up m.g., and then they only had time to fire a few shots. In that position we got two m.guns.

Strong-points were encountered at 4 places in my sector (reported Lieutenant J. H. Laphorne<sup>111</sup>). At only one of these was opposition encountered, and that only a few bursts of m.g. fire. Smoke grenades were used successfully . . . and large garrison of Germans surrendered.

In the sector of the left battalion (18th, New South Wales), attacking the Anzac Spur, the resistance was summed up by an officer as "a few shots, and run away." Germans fleeing from "Iron Cross Redoubt" were chased with Lewis gun fire. Fifteen others, badly shaken, surrendered from a pillbox near by. Farther north at "Anzac"—a two-story pillbox—the garrison of fifteen was dragging out its two machine-guns when overpowered.<sup>112</sup>

Thus between 7.30 and 7.45, still in exact accordance with the step-by-step programme, the second objective had been reached on the Australian front. Except at the southern end, it coincided with the Wilhelm Line, the German "main line of resistance." Success had again been equally complete along practically the whole line of the British offensive. The exceptions were of trifling importance. At "Hessian Wood," on the extreme southern flank, part of the IX Corps was stopped a little short of its final objective. The central division of the X Corps had difficulty in crossing the muddy Bassevillebeek to Tower Hamlets



<sup>110</sup> Lieut. C. C. J. McCann, M.C.; 27th Bn. Cabinet maker; of Glanville, S. Aust.; b. Adelaide, 1894.

<sup>111</sup> Lieut. J. H. Laphorne, M.C.; 27th Bn. Painter; of Hyde Park, S. Aust.; b. Hyde Park, 1893. (Laphorne himself was the first to reach some of these dugouts. It is said that the Germans mistook the bomb-smoke for gas.)

<sup>112</sup> The place had been an artillery observation-post, having two large lower chambers and a small upper chamber approached by a ladder. Upstairs were loopholes giving views over the targets for the artillery groups of this divisional sector, and marked with the names of the groups "Bellewaarde," "Westhoek" and so on. A field wireless-set was found there. The name "Anzac" caused this blockhouse to be of especial interest to the Australians, and a miniature Australian flag, obtained from the Comforts Fund, was placed on it by Lieutenant A. V. L. Hull (Lockhart, N.S.W.) of the 18th Battalion, and flew there until the heavy shelling next day. Sergeant B. Bateson (South Kensington, N.S.W.) of the 20th Battalion also planted a flag of his battalion there.

Spur. It gained the Blue Line but, in the centre, only after hard fighting which disorganised part of the troops for the third stage. One other division, the 55th, of the Fifth Army, was a little short of part of its objective.

There now followed a halt of two hours, in which the barrage again wandered into the German back area while the Blue Line troops dug in along their objective and the battalions for the third stage reorganised. Here again it was found that, when once the protective barrage thinned, German machine-guns from pillboxes close ahead, near "Lone House," at "Black Watch Corner," on the road north of Polygon Wood, and at "Garter Point," sniped at the digging infantry. Each place was at once captured by a few of the nearest troops, employing the tactics recently practised and now put into use at numerous points whenever a division advanced. Only the seizure of Black Watch Corner, because of its influence on the next stage, calls for description in detail. This blockhouse was a formidable



one, lying in the Wilhelm Line opposite the left company of the 5th Battalion 150 yards beyond the second objective. According to the artillery maps, the protective barrage should have lain 150 yards ahead of this point, but actually it was bursting over it, too thinly, however, to prevent the Germans from firing. As his men were being hit, Captain Moore<sup>113</sup> attacked the place, which also would have been particularly dangerous to the next advance. Company Sergeant-Major Collins<sup>114</sup> and some twenty men worked round it, and the garrison made signals of surrender. Captain Moore, a beloved officer, now ran towards the pillbox, but was immediately shot by a German who, according to the reports afterwards made, had already

<sup>113</sup> Capt. F. L. Moore, 5th Bn. Clerk; of Albert Park, Vic.; b. Albert Park, 10 April, 1895. Died of wounds, 20 Sept., 1917.

<sup>114</sup> Lieut. H. Collins, D.C.M.; 6th Bn. Salesman, of North Fitzroy, Vic.; b. Fitzroy, 3 Aug., 1892. Killed in action, 10 Aug., 1918.

surrendered.<sup>116</sup> The Victorians at once killed this man and others, and only interposition by their officers stopped them from exterminating the whole garrison. A German officer and 15 men with two machine-guns surrendered. To prevent German supports from reoccupying the post, the 5th dug in around it, the danger of its proximity to the British barrage not being realised.

On the northern flank Garter Point,<sup>116</sup> which was taken by Lieutenant Moors<sup>117</sup> and some of the 18th Battalion from Anzac House, lay 200 yards east of that place, practically on the line of the final objective.<sup>118</sup> Even after these nests had been cleared, the digging troops were constantly sniped at. A fresh breeze was now blowing away much of the shell-smoke, and the ground in front became visible. On the plateau itself fire came from the direction of a long, high mound, once the butt of the shooting range in the old Belgian practice ground at Polygon Wood. Its battered summit at the far end of the wood looked down on almost all parts of the Anzac forward area. Movement observable around it showed that the "Butte" was a headquarters and an

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<sup>116</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel D. A. Luxton's report says: "Captain F. L. Moore was mortally wounded by a man who had surrendered and who, when he saw an officer, dropped for the gun, fired a burst, and put up his hands again." Other versions exist, and there are some difficulties in the way of the complete acceptance of this report. The mistakes commonly made in hot blood during this murderous pillbox fighting are illustrated by a terrible incident, which occurred that day and about that time, and which has been described by Lieutenant W. D. Joynt of the 8th Battalion, himself afterwards a recipient of the Victoria Cross. He states that during this attack he came upon a wide circle of troops of his brigade surrounding a two-storied pillbox, and firing at a loop-hole in the upper story, from which shots were coming. One man, coolly standing close below and firing up at it, fell back killed, but the Germans in the lower chamber soon afterwards surrendered. The circle of Australians at once assumed easy attitudes, and the prisoners were coming out when a shot was fired, killing an Australian. The shot came from the upper story, whose inmates knew nothing of the surrender of the men below; but the surrounding troops were much too heated to realise this. To them the deed appeared to be the vilest treachery, and they forthwith bayonnetted the prisoners. One Victorian, about to bayonet a German, found that his own bayonet was not on his rifle. While the wretched prisoner implored him for mercy, he grimly fixed it and then bayonnetted the man. The Germans in this case were entirely innocent, but such incidents are inevitable in the heat of battle, and any blame for them lies with those who make wars, not with those who fight them.

<sup>117</sup> This was a strong pillbox on the same spur as Anzac, overlooking the next branch of the Hannebeek. Lieut. Moors, whose men were being fired on from there, had at once asked leave to seize it. A red cross flag was flying from it and, on capture, it was found to be a dressing station, and held two doctors and a number of wounded. Lieut. W. C. R. Smith (Mitchell's Island, N.S.W.) climbed on the pillbox and pulled the flag down.

<sup>118</sup> Lieut. W. S. Moors, M.C.; 18th Bn. Shipping clerk; of North Sydney and Mosman, N.S.W.; b. Tenterfield, N.S.W., 19 Oct., 1890.

<sup>119</sup> Of the other points seized, that near Lone House was taken by Sergeant C. J. Farnington (North Carlton, Vic.) of the 5th Battalion, who by himself captured 9 Germans and a machine-gun.

The cluster of pillboxes on the road north of Polygon Wood was seized by the 27th Battalion, which captured there a number of Germans and a machine-gun.

observation post. On the right, where the ground on which the Australians lay dipped towards the Reutelbeek, fire from the higher points was distinctly harassing. To avoid casualties, the 5th Battalion bent back the right of its Blue Line trench, and the 8th, organising behind it for the next stage, had to get into formation quickly and then lie low in shell-holes, while Lewis gunners kept down the German fire.<sup>119</sup>

The two hours' pause at this stage was regarded by many Australians as unnecessarily long, but, even on this day of unbroken success, some officers were glad of it. The 9th Battalion, which had been most disorganised by the German barrage before the start,<sup>120</sup> now obtained what its diary terms the "long hoped for" opportunity for reorganisation. Next to it, the 10th, whose two carrying companies had been almost equally disorganised, was straightened out largely by the effort of Captain Campbell.<sup>121</sup> Colonel Wilder-Neligan decided to leave his carrying companies here to fill the gap in the Blue Line left by the 12th Battalion's swing to the north, and to advance to the third objective with his two "storm" companies only. These, thoroughly reorganised, lay in their shell-holes eating sandwiches and smoking German cigars, while men detailed by Neligan as "newspaper boys" distributed copies of the *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Mail* specially procured by their mercurial commander. To strengthen him for the advance, Neligan asked his southern neighbour, the 7th Battalion, for a small reinforcement.

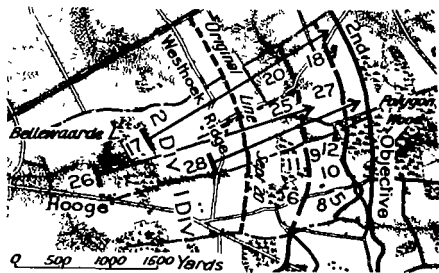
In the 2nd Division it was at this stage that the battalions for the final advance were brought up from Westhoek. The advanced troops, looking back, watched this movement with admiration. The German barrage had to be passed through. Since 6.19 it had lain along the Hannebeek, German observers

<sup>119</sup> This came largely from a line of about six pillboxes on the northern side of the Reutelbeek valley, the northernmost of them standing prominently on a knoll overlooking the valley. Near it, on the high southern edge of Polygon Wood, German machine-gunners, with the heavy British shells bursting about them, could be seen setting up their gun and firing. Fire also came from pillboxes on the southern side of the valley, opposite the 23rd British Division. A trench-mortar officer, Lieut. J. W. Darling (High Camp, Vic.), pushed forward one of his Stokes mortars and bombarded a pillbox across the valley. After a well-placed shell had burst at the entrance, the garrison came out with their hands up.

<sup>120</sup> This shelling had caused the tails of the 8th and 9th Battalions to be a little late for the start. The 9th came out of the fight with only 6 officers; in addition to those already mentioned, Lieuts. H. M. Flynn and R. McN. C. McKenzie of the 9th, and F.H.G.N. Heritage of the 10th, lost their lives. (Flynn and McKenzie belonged to Brisbane; Heritage to Frewville, S. Aust.)

<sup>121</sup> Capt. (temp. Major) G. C. Campbell, M.C.; 10th Bn. Barrister and solicitor; of Adelaide; b Adelaide, 4 June, 1885.

in Polygon Wood and at Broodseinde having quickly recognised the 2nd Division's penetration. But this barrage was only a shallow curtain, and, after watching the shell-bursts from Westhoek Ridge, many section commanders were able to detect gaps in it, and to lead their sections through them. Thus three battalions—the 28th (Western Australia), with the 26th (Queensland and Tasmania) in support, and the 17th (New South Wales)—arrived at the Blue Line in ample time for the final advance and with hardly a casualty.<sup>122</sup>



At the same time, on and behind both the objectives already captured, the mobile machine-guns—32 in each division—and Stokes mortars were being placed in position;<sup>123</sup> and, in addition to the infantry's trenches, parties of the field companies (2nd, 3rd, 7th, and 5th) were beginning to dig, at points prescribed in the divisional operation orders, a system of redoubts designed to ensure that the ground should be held.<sup>124</sup>

The one object of all this preparation was to meet the awaited counter-attack. To obtain early news of it, German prisoners as they arrived were taken to forward centres for interrogation, and by 7 a.m. Captain Wertheim,<sup>125</sup> intelligence

<sup>122</sup> Farther south, however, at Inverness Copse, one of the Green Line battalions of the 23rd Division (10th Duke of Wellington's Regiment), moving up at this stage, had serious casualties. This might also have happened in the 1st Australian Division, if its Green Line troops had been kept back.

<sup>123</sup> Some of the forward guns were emplaced in time to chase the Germans fleeing after the capture of each objective. A few of the captured machine-guns also were used, and—except that in the 3rd Brigade ammunition for a time was short—the machine-gun defence was very strong. In the 2nd Company, Sergeant H. S. Anquetil (of Brunswick, Vic.; killed on 4 Oct., 1917), whose own gun was destroyed, captured a German machine-gun, made its two gunners carry it for him, and then used the gun against the enemy. A few of the Hotchkiss guns of the 13th Light Horse were late, having lost their way. They were emplaced at the first objective for use against airmen.

<sup>124</sup> Except in the 3rd Brigade, this was done with infantry assistance. In these operations, also, the chief difficulties at this stage occurred on the exposed slope above the Reutelbeek. Lieut. J. J. Bourke, advancing to emplace his machine-guns, was killed, as were Lieut. J. Darbyshire (Numurkah, Vic.) of the 2nd Field Company and his N.C.O. and orderly, when pushing forward to site the intended strong-point on the right of the Blue Line. Lieut. W. A. Collins (Newcastle, N.S.W.), in charge of the construction of the next strong-point, seeing the right party unemployed, went over and set them at work.

<sup>125</sup> Capt. R. C. Wertheim, 2nd Pioneer Bn. Hardware merchant; of South Yarra, Vic.; b. Melbourne, 22 Dec., 1892. Died 11 Oct., 1933.

officer of the 2nd Division, learned from one of them that the counter-attack division for that sector lay at Moorslede and Waterdamhoek, and would probably come up in omnibuses and debouch about 9 or 10 a.m. from the north of Polygon Wood. This news was sent out to both the artillery and infantry. All day one of the many aeroplanes over the corps front line had the special duty of looking out for signs of a counter-attack, and an airman reported that at 8.30 he had seen one in preparation south of Zonnebeke—that is, close to the junction of I Anzac and V Corps. The 18th Battalion at "Anzac" came into possession of a belated German order through the arrival of a messenger dog, which raced up from Zonnebeke past Garter Point. As the dog arrived, panting, obviously at home at Anzac, a metal tube was seen on his collar.<sup>126</sup> It contained a message which a young prisoner translated: "From the regimental commander to . . . . . : Retake shellhole area. Arrange artillery by flare signals."

This was obviously an order from the 7th R.I.R. to its forward battalion commander (K.T.K.) to throw in his reserves from the Wilhelm Line in order to recapture the "crater-line." According to the history of the 60th I.R. (the next regiment on the north), such a counter-attack had already been made by two of its companies against the Scots on the Australian left, and had been shattered.<sup>127</sup> If any such effort was made on the Australian front, the troops were unaware of it.

The assembly seen at Zonnebeke by airmen was the next step, taken by the commander of the 60th I.R., who had brought up to Zonnebeke half of his reserve battalion and had ordered it, together with the last available company of the support battalion, to counter-attack along the Ypres-Roulers railway. The staff of the 56th R.I.R. was probably attempting about this time to organise a similar counter-attack at the northern edge of Polygon Wood. The outcome of these efforts will be described in due course.

At 9.53 the long pause ended. The barrage came down again in front of the Blue Line. The final advance, now launched, was to be short. But the operation

**The Third Stage** was complicated by two circumstances—first, the troops had already been forced to capture several pillboxes ahead of their proper starting line; second, the barrage, or at least a large proportion of shells,

<sup>126</sup> This was a brown dog, the size of a kelpie.

<sup>127</sup> Lieutenant of Reserve Markgraf, 60th I.R., led forward his company from the Wilhelm Stellung. The history of the 9th (Scottish) Division states that, at Hannebeek Wood, a company of the K.O.S.B. "intercepted and killed . . . a party of Germans who were moving up to reinforce their comrades in the wood."

in front of the 1st Division's centre at Polygon Wood was falling short. At the advanced points both the digging and the attacking troops were dangerously close to the intense bombardment that now descended. At Black Watch Corner the digging troops came under it, and had to fall quickly back just as the attack-battalions behind them were preparing to move forward. On the left, where the final objective at Garter Point had already been reached by the 18th Battalion, officers of the attack-battalion, the 17th, could not believe that no further advance was required of them. Fortunately the 17th's right company, when fifty yards from the barrage, observed the white smoke-shells in it, indicating the end of the advance, and stopped; but the other three companies ran into it and suffered casualties.<sup>128</sup> Almost every other battalion engaged in this stage had a somewhat similar experience.



The advance to the Green Line occupied in most parts only a few minutes. Everyone expected resistance at the points from which fire had been coming during the pause, and, if the Germans there had now been ready to come into the open, taking all risks, they could have caused great trouble. But the renewed impact of the overwhelming barrage had dissipated any such tendency. As the line advanced (disposed in this stage from left to right, as shown below)

17th Bn. 28th Bn.  
26th Bn.  
(2nd Division)

9th Bn. 10th Bn. 7th Bn. 8th Bn.  
(1st Division)

the enemy appeared glad to surrender.<sup>129</sup> The only difficulty was that of avoiding, and at the same time hugging, the British

<sup>128</sup> It is stated that, among others, Lieut. T. L. Ryan was killed, and Lieuts W. R. Haigh and R. W. Pettit wounded, at this juncture. (Ryan belonged to Wellin Grove, N.S.W.; Haigh, who died on 26 Nov., 1918, from the effects of gas, to Granville, N.S.W.; Pettit to Marrickville, N.S.W.)

<sup>129</sup> From the row of pillboxes north of the Reutelbeek, Germans came running to give themselves up to the 8th Battalion. In front of the 7th the garrison of a loop-holed pillbox showed fight, but surrendered as soon as the line swept past. Opposite the 28th Battalion one pillbox resisted. Lieut. G. G. Watts, Sergeant J. H. Pritchard, and Pte. J. A. Macdonald rushed it, shot the machine-gunners, and, leaving the gun, pressed on to the objective (Watts belonged to Prospect, S. Aust.; Pritchard to Kalgoorlie, W. Aust.; Macdonald to Broome, W. Aust. Watts and Macdonald were killed later in the fight; Pritchard died from effects of gas, 4 Nov., 1917.)



barrage.<sup>130</sup> South of Polygon Wood the company led by Major Tubb (of Lone Pine fame) seized a group of nine pillboxes which, by the artillery map, should have been 250 yards short of the barrage. Word immediately came back that part of the barrage was falling on them, and that Major Tubb had been wounded.<sup>131</sup> The troops nevertheless held on, Lieutenant O'Connor<sup>132</sup> taking charge.

Part of the troops north of this, comprising portions of the 7th, 10th, and 9th Battalions, ran into their barrage, and had to come back and wait until efforts should be made to raise the curtain of shells which continued to fall close in front of the Blue Line. On their left the 28th Battalion, finding that its objective lay on a rear slope, moved forward a little to the crest of Anzac Spur. On the extreme left the 17th dug in with the 18th, who were already in position.<sup>133</sup> A flight of eight German aeroplanes, which managed to break through the screen maintained all day by the British flying corps, fired with machine-guns upon these troops, but without much effect,<sup>134</sup> and then passed on to attack the artillery, also with slight results.<sup>135</sup> A greater annoyance was the fire of the German artillery, directed upon the 28th and 17th as soon as they began to dig in on the Anzac Spur.<sup>136</sup>

<sup>130</sup> The 8th Battalion is said to have suffered more from short-shooting by certain of the supporting guns than from any other cause. One 18-pounder caused the loss of about 30 men. Some battalions were able to allow for this short-shooting and avoid the "lane" along which such a gun was firing. A few of the "heavies" shot so short that shells supposed to fall at least 300 yards beyond the *third* objective continued to burst on and in rear of the *second* objective. The line had to be temporarily withdrawn at several points; and, although efforts were made by *liaison* officers from the artillery to have these errors corrected, it was found most difficult to identify the guns responsible. "No one would claim it," complained Colonel Mitchell of the 18-pounder which cut about the 8th, and killed R.S.M. J. R. Taylor (Ballarat, Vic.) outside battalion headquarters. At least one gun was still firing short when these battalions were relieved a day or two later.

<sup>131</sup> He died that evening at the dressing station. About this stage of the advance Lieutenants F. E. Foers and H. Attwood (7th) and A. R. Fulton (8th) also were killed. (Foers belonged to Preston, Vic.; Attwood to Bendigo, Vic.; Fulton to Elsternwick, Vic.)

<sup>132</sup> Capt. T. P. O'Connor, 7th Bn. Engineer's assistant; of East Caulfield, Vic.; b. Tallygaroopna, Vic., 10 Aug., 1885.

<sup>133</sup> The sector was shortly afterwards divided between the two battalions, each gradually sorting out its troops and distributing them in two or three lines in depth.

<sup>134</sup> As far as is known, they hit three Australians of whom Lieut. H. E. Clifton (Strathfield, N.S.W.), in charge of a carrying party of the 17th Battalion, was one.

<sup>135</sup> One aeroplane was shot down by a Lewis gun of the 2nd Pioneer Battalion attached to the artillery for that purpose.

<sup>136</sup> Lieutenants C. R. Hannaford (17th Bn.), L. J. Corrigan and C. Cleary (18th), and G. G. Watts and E. A. W. Smith (28th) were killed here, and Lieutenants V. N. Hopkins (17th) and R. L. Fidge (18th) mortally wounded. The 28th also lost Lieutenant A. J. Tye killed (Hannaford belonged to Willoughby, N.S.W.; Corrigan to Waverley, N.S.W.; Cleary to Stanmore, N.S.W.; Watts to Prospect, S. Aust.; Smith to Claremont, W. Aust.; Hopkins to Woodville, S. Aust.; Fidge to Yanco and Sydney, N.S.W.; Tye to Norseman, W. Aust.)

The troops, however, avoided this by moving slightly forward. Farther back the German barrage was by this time heavy along the Hannebeek, but here, too, the company commanders of both the 20th and 25th Battalions avoided it by moving forward and settling into shell-holes well up the rear slope of Anzac Spur.

It seems probable that the 17th and 28th Battalions came under direct fire from the 4th and 5th Batteries of the 241st F.A.R. (121st Division), which, according to the history of their unit, were emplaced on the western slope of the Broodseinde Ridge, near Molenaarlesthoek, and fired at the advancing lines.

By 10.15 the advance was finished except in the centre of the 1st Australian Division, where the troops were kept back by their own barrage. It was quickly arranged that the artillery should, on that front, lengthen range by 200 yards, and the troops who had been waiting went forward without difficulty.<sup>137</sup> The enemy seemed to be crushed, for although the Australians dug-in in full view, with only a proportion of Lewis gunners in shell-holes fifty yards ahead to cover them, in most parts barely a shot was now fired at them. On the right one or two pillboxes close in front had, as before, to be seized. From one of them, after adventurously stalking it, the intelligence officer of the 8th, Lieutenant Errey,<sup>138</sup> extracted a Bavarian battalion commander, his adjutant, 30 men, and two machine-guns.<sup>139</sup>

News of the success in the first stage had gone back quickly, but for some time afterwards communication, especially from the right, was very slow. The brigade—and even the battalion—commanders concerned were for a time

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<sup>137</sup> In the 10th Battalion this advance was made by the "storm companies" alone, the reinforcement from the 7th not having arrived, and not being required. (The message asking for it was timed 9.50, only three minutes before the start of the third phase, and was received at 10.2, when the advance elsewhere was nearly over. Lieutenant-Colonel Herrod at 10.12 ordered two platoons to assist, but, by the time they arrived, the 10th also had advanced.) The main obstacle was provided by the marshy state of this end of the "wood." The reorganised 9th had to fight a machine-gun at one pillbox, but easily took it from the rear.

<sup>138</sup> Lieut. L. G. P. Errey, D.S.O., M.C.; 8th Bn. Carpenter; of Camperdown, Vic.; b. Camperdown, 3 Nov., 1891. Died of wounds, 4 Oct., 1917.

<sup>139</sup> Errey was free to do this, having no duty in connection with consolidation. A machine-gun was firing from the pillbox, which was 100 yards out on the edge of the Reutelbeek valley. Errey took four men and crept round it. The machine-gun had him under fire until he was ten yards away. He then got beneath its limit of depression and shot the gunner. A second pillbox, in the barrage line immediately south of Polygon Wood, was seized by the 7th with the aid of its allotted Stokes mortar. After clearing it, the 7th, under Colonel Herrod's orders, withdrew until the barrage was further adjusted.

under the impression that the second line had been unable to take Black Watch Corner, and that serious delay had occurred in the third advance.<sup>140</sup> At 11.25, however, a map dropped by the contact airman<sup>141</sup> at 1st Divisional Headquarters showed the flares lighted by the troops all along the final objective, and in parts well ahead of it.<sup>142</sup> In the centre of the X Corps the 41st Division's left brigade, which had had to fight so heavily for its second objective, had failed to secure part of the third on Tower Hamlets Spur. At all essential points, however, success was complete.

It is difficult to recapture the sudden lift of spirits experienced throughout the British side on that battlefield when news spread that the British line again ran across the main heights, through Polygon Wood. That the enemy would attempt immediately to win back the high ground, was taken for granted. Yet in the front line no symptoms of counter-attack could be seen; indeed, except for a few nests from which came sniping or machine-gun fire, it was quite uncertain where the enemy was. On the ridge itself, when the barrage died down, the thin stumps of Polygon Wood, shimmering in the noon-day heat above a wilderness of brown shell-holes, showed in most parts no sign of movement. From the grim mound at its farther end a few figures, apparently observers, were hunted off by Lewis guns and by increased shelling.<sup>143</sup> Small patrols and individual "diggers" began to push forward. Pauses had been ordained in the protective barrage, but even without such arrangement, with so

<sup>140</sup> At 11 a.m. General Walker (1st Division) informed General Smyth (2nd Division) that he believed his troops were on the Blue Line and would not be able to advance to the Green Line until about 1 p.m. To ascertain the position at Black Watch Corner he had sent out at 9.20 a light horse patrol (under arrangements initiated by corps headquarters as an experiment); but, as on other occasions within Australian experience, the attempt to use mounted troops under the conditions of these western battles was futile. The patrol's report was correct, but did not arrive until 1.30; accurate information from other sources had come to hand two and a half hours before. A similar result followed the sending out this day of other mounted patrols by both divisional commanders.

<sup>141</sup> The 4th Squadron, R.F.C. (24 machines), acted with I Anzac.

<sup>142</sup> The map showed on the right a line of flares south-west of "Cameron House," a German strong-point 350 yards ahead of the 8th Battalion. General Walker advanced the barrage to be clear of these, and at 1.30 ordered another light horse patrol to ascertain the position. The report of this patrol, that no Australian troops were there, was received at 4 p.m. Long before then, however, the question had been answered through the normal channels, and Walker brought back the barrage there at 2.50 p.m.

<sup>143</sup> A battery of 60-pounders kept the Butte under fire throughout, but, in addition, a battery of 6-inch howitzers was now turned upon it.

little opposition apparent nothing could have prevented "prospectors" from issuing in search of more prisoners, souvenirs, and adventures.<sup>144</sup>

It was shortly before noon that, on the farther part of the main ridge a mile beyond the 1st Division, and also in the Reutelbeek valley at some nearer points, Germans with guns or limbers were seen engaged on some hurried task. At the same time infantry was observed concentrating at "Cameron Covert" above the Reutelbeek, and also arriving at the Butte and, apparently, being distributed from there. The great barrage, which was still making its orchestral movements, presently drenched these areas with shell, and the traffic apparently ceased. At 1.48, as no counter-attack appeared to be imminent anywhere, the barrage came to an end on the Anzac front after having run its course for eight hours and eight minutes.<sup>145</sup> Guns and machine-guns now waited for the signalling of a counter-attack, or for a call to fire on special targets. By this time the intelligence branch had received from prisoners a further warning, that, on the 1st Division's front, the counter-attack would assemble at Cameron Covert and in the folds north and south of the Reutelbeek. The places indicated by prisoners were almost precisely those at which movement had already been observed.<sup>146</sup>

Shortly after 2 o'clock Germans began to appear again. From the Butte infantry continued to dribble, as in the

<sup>144</sup> These enterprises, which eight months later became a most effective field of Australian activity, were not yet always entirely successful. For example, a succession of three concrete dugouts ahead of Major Tubb's company of the 7th Battalion attracted one of the subalterns, Lieutenant W. H. G. Smith (North Melbourne), and with two or three men he went out to investigate them. Two were found empty, but near the third a machine-gun was firing. It was cunningly emplaced, but a private named John Costello (Malvern, Vic.) volunteered to get in rear of it. He did so, and was creeping up to bomb it when he was badly wounded by a British shell, and was afterwards made prisoner. Again, on the Australian left, Lieutenant W. C. R. Smith of the 18th took with him Lance-Corporal W. H. Kates (Narrandera, N.S.W.) and a Lewis gunner, and went out to suppress a machine-gun which, from a pillbox in the next valley, was troubling the troops digging in at Garter Point. Finding themselves under Lewis gun fire the Germans made signs of surrender, but, on standing up to direct them, Smith was shot through the head. (The leader of the patrol first mentioned, Lieut. W. H. G. Smith, died of illness on 30 Oct., 1918.)

<sup>145</sup> The machine-gun barrage had ended after 4 hours 13 minutes.

<sup>146</sup> They also stated that the counter-attacking division in the northern sector would be the 3rd Reserve, and in the southern the 16th Bavarian. Particularly detailed information was obtained early, from a Bavarian officer.

forenoon, towards the cemetery at the upper end of "Albania Valley." About the same time from Zonnebeke southwards, across the front of the 2nd Australian Division, there marched towards Molenaarshoek a column of infantry with either one or two batteries of artillery. South of the main ridge another force was obviously concentrating on either side of the Reutelbeek valley. With reference to the movement on the northern side of the ridge, at 2.40 p.m., an observer of the 2nd Divisional Artillery reported:



*Except at Fitzclarence Farm and Westhoek, the Australian trenches are as they appeared in air-photographs on Sept. 23.*

Huns dribbling across from mound to cemetery in threes and fours. Our men souvenir hunting in Polygon Wood.

The message added that the enemy appeared likely to counter-attack from the cemetery and the "Tokio Spur."<sup>147</sup> The 2nd Division's artillery at once turned upon the spur and Albania Valley. At 3.15 the infantry fired the S.O.S. signal, but the barrage was already falling. No organised action could persist under that storm. A few minutes later some movement was reported there, but the artillery observer telegraphed that this seemed "more confusion than anything else."<sup>148</sup> The concentrations in the Reutelbeek valley, reported by Australian and British troops on that side of the ridge, were similarly shelled, Stokes mortars of the 2nd Australian Light Trench Mortar Battery assisting.

The movements observed between 11 and 3 o'clock were the signs of two separate efforts by the enemy. North of the ridge, opposite the 2nd Australian Division and the right of the Scots, the earlier movement appears to have been that of the *line division*, the 121st

<sup>147</sup> Lieut. A. H. Leslie (Bathurst, N.S.W., and Perth, Scotland), 18th Bn, was killed by sniping fire from there.

<sup>148</sup> An advance against the South African Brigade also was caught in the barrage, and (as an Australian officer said) "disappeared in dust."

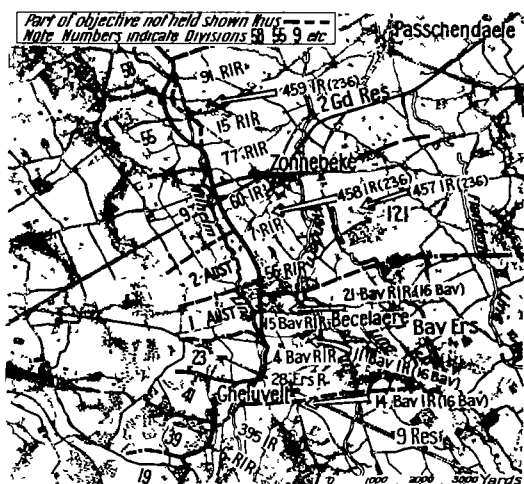
(Prussian), trying to carry out the standing instruction to counter-attack with its reserve battalions. The attempt of three companies of the 60th I.R. to advance from Zonnebeke along the railway is described by Lieutenant Vonalt in the history of that regiment, and is typical. His company, advancing north of the railway opposite the South African Brigade, was detected and came under "fearful drum-fire." This forced it first to advance by rushes, then to creep from crater to crater, finally to make for whatever shelter it could find. Vonalt and the remnant of his platoon, out of touch with all others, lay in a cellar until the inevitable heavy shell pierced it, killing or wounding most of his men. After pulling from the ruin those whom they could, he and five men crept southwards to a half-crushed pillbox in which they found their company commander and men of several companies and regiments. Here they lay until again a shell struck the cracked wall, and sent splinters of concrete flying through the chamber. The inmates left the place and pressed forward to get clear of shell-fire, when they were suddenly met by rifle-fire coming from 300 yards ahead. As they were in no condition to effect anything more, they stayed here, lying low in the craters.

Similarly, opposite the right flank of the 2nd Australian Division, the reserve of the 56th R.I.R. managed to assemble and edge forward in several waves, but could do no more.

The movements seen towards 3 o'clock north of the ridge, and from a much earlier hour south of it, were those of the *counter-attack divisions*. The 234th counter-attacked from the northern wing of the Ypres corps against the left of the British thrust. The 236th advanced from the southern wing of the same corps against the V British Corps and 2nd Australian Division. Its northernmost regiment, the 459th, moving through Passchendaele against part of the 55th British Division, succeeded in

throwing it back slightly, but afterwards lost some of the recaptured ground. The 458th I.R., together with its attached batteries of the 7th F.A.R., reinforced the 121st Division, whose remnants were facing the 2nd Australian Division and the Scots. This was the movement of infantry and guns seen on Tokio Spur. Under the storm of artillery-fire which it called down, it dwindled

from an organised march into a pushing forward of groups from shell-hole to shell-hole, and finally died out in the crater-field several hundred yards from the Australian line.



On and south of Polygon ridge, in the northern sector of the Wyttschaete corps, the counter-attack division had arrived much earlier. This division was the 16th Bavarian. Its foremost regiment, the 21st Bav. R.I.R. (which in 1916, as member of another division, had faced the Australian attack at Fromelles), had been brought up to Becelaere at 5.15. Between 7.38 and 8.45 its three battalions were despatched to reinforce the right and centre of the line division (the Bavarian Ersatz). The last of them (the I Battalion) was to hold "at all costs" the Wilhelm Line on the right flank of the corps at Polygon Wood. It found, however, that the Wilhelm Line was already lost. The two other battalions had been ordered to retake it, north and south of the Reutelbeek respectively, while the attached battery barraged Black Watch Corner. But both had suffered casualties before they reached even the Flandern I Line, and now (according to the regimental history) "overpowering artillery fire drove them quickly to earth." They struggled on—south of the valley, to Polderhoek Chateau; north of it, to the Flandern I Line. "To reach the other end of the (Polygon) wood was no longer possible." At the wood the utmost that could be done was gradually to find touch along a line considerably short of the Australian front, and this was only effected "after the greater part of the I Bn. had been dribbled into odd gaps in the crater-field."

The other two regiments of the division (11th and 14th Bav. I.R.) were thrown in at Polderhoek and further south, but effected nothing except at Tower Hamlets. The first counter-attack division of the Wyttschaete corps being thus entirely committed, there were brought up behind it in the evening the leading battalions of the 50th Reserve Division.

At 4 o'clock, at the request of the infantry of the 2nd Australian Division, the barrage on Albania Valley was stopped. The German artillery was by now throwing strong barrages, but almost everywhere these missed the Australian lines, overshooting the front line, and rarely falling on the others. In the 1st Division's sector the back lines caught some bombardment,<sup>149</sup> but the whole area was shelled in a scattered fashion, as if the enemy was uncertain of the target.

It is now known that the German artillery was uncertain of the position. Moreover its batteries, many of which at the end of the attack were within 800–1,700 yards of the Australian infantry, suffered heavy loss.<sup>150</sup> The 8th and 9th Batteries of the 241st F.A.R., not far behind the mound in Polygon Wood, might have brought direct fire on the

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<sup>149</sup> In the 6th Battalion (Red Line), Lieut. F. Birks and, next day, Lieut. R. M. McMillan (Fitzroy, Vic.) were killed. On the Blue Line a number of officers of the 5th, including Major A. R. Caughey (Toorak and Caulfield, Vic.), were wounded.

<sup>150</sup> This was the worst day for the 241st F.A.R. in the Flanders battle. It lost 6 officers and 54 men, and had 10 guns put out of action. The commander of the counter-attack detachment (2nd and 7th Batteries) was early killed, and one of his battery commanders badly wounded. The commander of the group to which they were then transferred was killed. Two batteries of the 236th Division, reinforcing the "Westhoek Group," lost their commanders killed.

1st Australian Division's advance, but they lost all their guns through the British bombardment. The 4th, in front of Broodseinde Ridge, had two guns put out of action, but was able to hit one of the I Anzac wireless tanks in the old No-Man's Land at Glencorse Wood.<sup>151</sup> This artillery was reinforced by a number of batteries of the counter-attack division (236th). One of these (4/7th F.A.R.) managed to advance along the main ridge to a position near Molenaarsthoek. The field artillery of the 121st Division is said to have expended this day 40,000 shells.



The Australian infantry was not greatly harassed by this bombardment; the records show that it was the German heavy artillery that inflicted loss. Its fire was severe in the back area, but organisation was hardly interfered with. Medical work went on without interruption.<sup>152</sup> The 1st Pioneer Battalion cleared and staked out two tracks to Black Watch Corner and Polygon Wood<sup>153</sup> respectively. In the 2nd Division's area the 26th Battalion dug a communication trench back towards Westhoek Ridge. The 19th carried material and dug strong-points. The work of entrenching was throughout closely supervised by the battalion commanders.<sup>154</sup> An ample store of German shovels and wire was found in Polygon Wood and the new trenches were thus in some parts strongly protected with wire.

<sup>151</sup> Several of the tank crew were killed. Lieut. G. H. (now Sir Hubert) Wilkins, then Australian Official Photographer, who was on the lee side of the tank obtaining photographs of the barrage for the Australian records, had some of his negatives broken.

<sup>152</sup> This is constantly recorded with admiration. Major W. W. S. Johnston (attached 12th Bn.), when his aid post near Glencorse Wood became full, carried on in the open until severely wounded. The devotion of Major S. V. Appleyard (attached 10th Bn.) and of the medical officer of the 26th Battalion (Capt. F. L. Bignell) is particularly mentioned. Of the latter Sgt. J. R. Edwards of a sister battalion wrote, "He and his plucky corporal were out in the shell-fire succouring all the wounded they could find." "I never met a doctor who wasn't game, and this chap was one of the best." (Johnston belonged to Melbourne; Appleyard, who died on 28 Aug., 1926, to London and Sydney; Bignell, who died on 27 Aug., 1928, to Lismore, N.S.W.; Edwards to Broken Hill, N.S.W., and Ivanhoe, Vic.)

<sup>153</sup> Lieut. J. M. Wilson (Eaglehawk, Vic.) was killed.

<sup>154</sup> The records contain abundant evidence of this. Colonels Herrod (7th) and Elliott (12th) personally directed the work for a time in their sectors, Elliott sitting part of his Blue Line trench outside the edge of Polygon Wood, as the tree-stumps made digging difficult. Colonel Daly (6th) reported his personal inspection of the strong-point dug in his area. Colonel Read (28th) made an early and careful inspection of his line before noon. Colonel Martin (17th) placed his headquarters in a shell-hole in the front line near Garter Point. On several of its members being hit there, headquarters moved to the Garter Point pillbox. Colonel Miles (G.S.O. 2, and Divn.) reconnoitred the front line next day.





40 PILIBOXES AT POLYGONVELD, POLYGON WOOD, AND THE BUTTE, SEEN FROM THE FRONT  
LINE OF THE 7TH BRIGADE, 21ST SEPTEMBER, 1917

*Aust War Memorial Official Photos Nos E783b,c*

*To face p 784.*



41. THE 7TH BRIGADE'S LINE AT POLYGOONEVELD ON 21ST SEPTEMBER, 1917, LOOKING NORTH-WEST

In front lie, first, the stakes of the entanglement in front of "Albert Redoubt"; next, scrub in the valley short of "Anzac Ridge"; "Anzac Ridge"; "Albama Wood"; finally Broodseinde Ridge. On the extreme left are the trees of Zonnebeke.

It had been intended to bring up the reserve brigades (1st and 6th) to take over the Red Line. But shortly before noon General Birdwood, being warned by a British airman that the Australian front appeared to be already crowded, countermanded this movement, for which orders had just been issued, and pressed the divisional commanders to get their troops more thinly distributed in depth. The successive lines of posts were in most sectors quickly linked up into continuous trenches.<sup>155</sup>

About 6 p.m. Germans were seen creeping forward in Albania Valley,<sup>156</sup> and at 6.2 the S.O.S. signal was sent up on Anzac Ridge. The British Army had at last been furnished with a suitable firework, which burst into three single lights, red, green, yellow, and left them floating in the air one above the other for several minutes. This unmistakable signal instantly brought down the barrage<sup>157</sup> which, on the 2nd Division's front, lasted forty minutes. The German shelling also became severe, both the 19th Battalion's strong-points on the left being blown up.<sup>158</sup> Most of the line, however, escaped, and no German counter-attack came through.

On the Anzac right events took a similar course. At 6.30, after bombardment, the enemy moved against the 69th British Brigade. The British artillery was turned on. At 7.8, after a shelling of the 1st Australian Division's Blue Line, Germans were seen moving north of the Reutelbeek also. The S.O.S. signal went up. A tremendous answering

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<sup>155</sup> Most Australian officers and men still preferred these to the irregular lines of posts in shell-holes, which harsh experience was gradually proving to be the only safe disposition on a heavily-shelled battlefield. With a continuous trench, lateral communication and control were much easier, and the men had more confidence. One battalion commander, however, reported that, where his men occupied shell-hole positions, the German airmen failed to observe them, and they escaped shelling.

<sup>156</sup> Artillerymen also were seen galloping off with a field-gun north of the Polygon Butte, and trying to cart away the ammunition.

<sup>157</sup> The troops were delighted with these quick responses, the machine-guns opening in a few seconds and the artillery within half-a-minute. The machine-gun barrage greatly increased their confidence.

<sup>158</sup> Lieutenant H. W. Wilks, 5th Field Coy., was wounded before he could mark out one strong-point, but his N.C.O., L/Cpl. A. J. Buchanan, went forward, sited it, and then returned and led up the working party. After digging the strong-points, the 19th garrisoned them. Lieut. M. R. Tickner, in charge of one, was killed, and Lieut. L. P. Israel, at the other, wounded. About two-thirds of both garrisons were hit. The non-commissioned officers in charge, Sgts. K. J. Brown and A. Gibbs, most pluckily carried on. (Wilks belonged to Camberwell, Vic.; Buchanan to Hurstville, N.S.W.; Tickner to Sydney; Israel to Woollahra, N.S.W.; Brown to Byron Bay, N.S.W.; and Gibbs, to Merthyr Tydfil, Wales, and Scarborough, N.S.W.), who died on 8 May, 1933.

barrage opened within twenty seconds, and spread gradually northwards. It lasted for an hour. An officer of the 8th Battalion said afterwards that his post "simply sat down and laughed. They knew the Germans could not get through it, yet they were praying for the Germans to get through."

On the 2nd Division's front the disturbance at 6 o'clock was due to preparatory movements for an attack ordered by the 236th Division for 6 o'clock. It was to be made by the 457th I.R., together with the 1/458th and remnants of the 121st Division. The 458th I.R., however, had already been split up and heavily shelled, and the 457th in the bombardment could not find its way through the crater-field. The fury of the British shelling even caused the Germans to imagine that it was the British who were attacking, and the German bombardment was largely an answer to the supposed threat. Consequently the 236th Division's counter-attack was never made.

The movements seen by the 1st Australian Division were the sign of similar efforts by the 16th Bavarian Division. Thus, so far as the I Anzac front was concerned, the counter-attacking forces from the two German "storm divisions" were used up without any counter-attack having even been launched.

With this artillery storm at nightfall, the actual fighting on the Anzac front ended. The night that followed was extraordinarily quiet; Australian patrols went deep into Polygon Wood.<sup>159</sup> The enemy was evidently groping to find his own front, and the capture of men of the 16th Bavarian Division, who stumbled into the Australian lines, brought to the Anzac staff the first intimation that any counter-attack division had already been thrown in. At dawn—4.30 a.m.—on the 21st the great barrage, machine-gun fire and all, came down again as prearranged, and swept forward for 2,000 yards. Part of the field artillery had been brought forward to Bellewaarde and Westhoek Ridges during the previous afternoon.<sup>160</sup>

During the morning of the 21st some movement 200-300 yards ahead of the line in Polygon Wood suggested that the enemy was trying to establish his front there. The 2nd Brigade's Stokes mortars were turned on, and cleared about a

<sup>159</sup> L./Cpl. R. R. Inwood (Broken Hill, N.S.W.), of the 10th, went 600 yards and found that there were Germans in the shelters near the Butte. In the Reutelbeek valley Cpl. A. C. Hall (Berringa, Vic.), of the 8th, in charge of a patrol, saw Germans moving and challenged them in their own language. A German officer came over to see who this was. On finding Australians, he tried to escape, but was shot.

<sup>160</sup> It was warned for this move as soon as the third objective was consolidated.

company of Germans from the shell-holes.<sup>161</sup> New Australian posts were here pushed out several hundred yards ahead of the Green Line in Polygon Wood and the Reutelbeek valley. Throughout the day German aircraft tried to harass both the infantry and the artillery.<sup>162</sup> They did comparatively little direct damage, but the German shelling, previously general, now became more accurate.<sup>163</sup> Late in the afternoon the advance parties of Australian relieving battalions began to make their way to various parts of the front, and at 6.30 a German bombardment fell heavily on the pillboxes in the 2nd Division's area. Anzac House and Garter Point were hit again and again.<sup>164</sup> The S.O.S. signal appeared in the sky, first above the 2nd Division's left front, and at 7 o'clock above its right, and almost immediately afterwards above the 1st Division's front also.<sup>165</sup> The artillery of both sides came down with tremendous force. Some movement, not only of German infantry but of field artillery, had undoubtedly occurred north-east of the Butte.<sup>166</sup> As before, however, no counter-attack appeared. At 8 o'clock the shelling ceased on both sides.

German records show that, far from any counter-attack being attempted at this time, the Germans imagined that the British were attacking, and again believed that the German barrage stopped them. This night the batteries of the 121st Division, forward of Broodseinde, with one exception, moved back to the Keiberg, whither those of the 236th Division had gone the night before. Possibly this withdrawal was what the Australians saw.

<sup>161</sup> In this wood in the morning a German machine-gun was detected by L/Cpl. Inwood (10th Bn.) and some soldier of the 7th. Creeping behind the gun, they bombed it and made a surviving German gunner carry it in to the Australian lines for them. For this and for his scouting operations, Inwood received the Victoria Cross. The name of the 7th Battalion man was not recorded.

<sup>162</sup> It being impossible to maintain a barrage of British aircraft, the Germans flew over at dawn, and at noon seven of their machines dropped bombs around the field batteries. At 3 p.m. several bombing aeroplanes, escorted by fighters, repeated this attempt and bombed part of the 1st Battalion at Halfway House, causing 20 casualties, including Lieuts. F. J. Bruton and H. A. Clow (both of Sydney) wounded. At 6 p.m. German machines came over in force, 45 being counted at one time.

<sup>163</sup> During this and the following days the casualties were almost entirely due to shell-fire. Among others, Lieuts. B. C. Lehmann (3rd M.G. Coy.), R. M. McMillan (6th Bn.), R. E. Sara (7th Bn.), N. E. W. Waraker, and H. E. Mengersen (25th Bn.) were killed or mortally wounded. (Lehmann belonged to Fremantle, W. Aust.; McMillan to Fitzroy, Vic.; Sara to Learmonth, Vic.; Waraker to Brisbane; Mengersen to Palmer, S. Aust.)

<sup>164</sup> At Anzac House five men, and the German messenger dog captured the day before, were killed.

<sup>165</sup> The first S.O.S. there was fired without orders by a sentry at 7th Bn. H.Q., which immediately reported this fact.

<sup>166</sup> It was seen by the 18th Battalion, and by Lieut. R. Brown's company of the 28th. At 7.45, while the uproar was at its height, there passed through portion of the 2nd Division a disturbing report that the 1st Division's left had been broken through. Observers of the 2nd Division, however, at once stated that the only troops whom they could see moving were carrying parties. The report was probably due to some part of the front-line troops having to fall back temporarily, as in a few places they constantly did, to avoid the shells of a short-shooting howitzer.

During the night of the 21st the infantry that had carried out the attack was relieved by battalions of the 1st and 6th Brigades,<sup>167</sup> and these themselves were relieved on the nights of the 22nd and 23rd by troops of the 5th and 4th Divisions, which were to deliver the next blow.

So ended, with complete success, the first step in Haig's trial of true step-by-step tactics. The British Army did this day precisely what it was intended to do, and did it even more cleanly than at Messines. The objectives being easily within the capacity of the troops, there were few "ragged edges"—only two local attacks were launched afterwards, one at Hill 37 by the 55th Division, which succeeded, and one at Tower Hamlets by the 41st Division, which failed. The fact that the Germans were well prepared, and had their counter-attack divisions ready, was actually an advantage. The more the enemy thrust his reserves under that crushing barrage the better, for practically none of them came through. Although German historians still assert that the British attack was in some way brought to a stop by the German "counter-attack,"<sup>168</sup> the movements actually made by counter-attack divisions were in most parts not counter-attacks at all, but costly efforts to reach the positions to which the line divisions had been driven back. Not only did none of the counter-attack troops reach the Australian infantry, but their effort could barely even be detected by it. The German command would have secured the same result at far less cost, if it had used the storm divisions merely to relieve the remnant of the line divisions after dark.

The fact stands out that the Allies were now using their superiority in material in a way which, granted fine weather, made success certain. It is true that, if the figures relating to the Australian front are a true guide, the losses on the two sides were about equal, or the British loss even slightly in excess of the

<sup>167</sup> The field companies of 1st Divn. had been relieved on the night of the 20th. In the 2nd Divn. the 19th Battalion, and the machine-gun companies and trench-mortar batteries of the attack-brigades, remained with the incoming brigades.

<sup>168</sup> Even the German Official History (*Schlachten des Welt Krieges*, Vol. 27, p. 117) says that the counter-attack divisions "recaptured" a line 1,500 metres east of the old line.

German.<sup>169</sup> As at Messines, this was probably due to the precaution of manning four or five successive defence lines against a counter-attack which never came.<sup>170</sup> But, even if the loss was approximately equal, the German troops came out of this battle crushed, and the British comparatively fresh. "The new English method of attack," says the German Official History,<sup>171</sup> "had proved its effectiveness . . . The loss of a sector so terribly fought over as Nonne Bosschen and Glen-corse Wood was necessarily also of great moral effect." On

<sup>169</sup> No accurate figures of the total loss are available, but the British loss was probably between 20,000 and 25,000. The Germans lost in prisoners about 3,500. The Australian casualties numbered 5,013 (1st Division, 2,754; 2nd Division, 2,259). Of the German divisions partly facing I Anzac, the 121st lost 2,600, the 236th probably 600, and the 16th Bavarian 1,840. The Bavarian Ersatz Division between Aug. 28 and Sept. 20 lost 2,670. Rather more than half of these divisions faced the Australians. Assuming that the Bavarian Ersatz Division lost 2,000 in this battle, and that four-sevenths of the casualties were incurred on the Australian front, the German loss on the same front would be 4,239. The details of the Australian loss were:—

1st Infantry Brigade.			1st Australian Division.			3rd Infantry Brigade.		
	Off. O.R.			Off. O.R.			Off. O.R.	
1st Bn. . .	8	144	5th Bn. . .	11	270	Bde. H Q. . .	—	1
2nd Bn. . .	11	188	6th Bn. . .	10	248	9th Bn. . .	10	228
3rd Bn. . .	4	159	7th Bn. . .	10	191	10th Bn. . .	10	197
4th Bn. . .	4	73	8th Bn. . .	10	219	11th Bn. . .	10	162
1st F. Coy. Eng. . .	1	23	2nd F. Coy. Eng. . .	—	5	12th Bn. . .	7	165
1st M.G. Coy. . .	2	13	2nd M.G. Coy. . .	4	35	3rd F. Coy. Eng. . .	—	17
1st L.T.M. Bty. . .	—	9	2nd L.T.M. Bty. . .	—	11	3rd M.G. Coy. . .	5	36
1st Fld. Amb. . .	—	5	2nd Fld. Amb. . .	—	17	3rd L.T.M. Bty. . .	2	6
	—	—		—	—	3rd Fld. Amb. . .	—	21
	30	614		45	996		44	833
Artillery . . .	5	85	21st M.G. Coy. . .	—	44	1st Pioneer Bn. . .	1	50
1st Div. Sig. Coy. . .	—	7						

5th Infantry Brigade.			2nd Australian Division.			7th Infantry Brigade.		
	Off. O.R.			Off. O.R.			Off. O.R.	
17th Bn. . .	9	257	21st Bn. . .	1	30	25th Bn. . .	6	129
18th Bn. . .	12	263	22nd Bn. . .	3	94	26th Bn. . .	7	127
19th Bn. . .	9	139	23rd Bn. . .	4	95	27th Bn. . .	6	157
20th Bn. . .	12	264	24th Bn. . .	3	87	28th Bn. . .	10	239
5th F. Coy. Eng. . .	1	6	6th F. Coy. Eng. . .	—	5	7th F. Coy. Eng. . .	1	6
5th M.G. Coy. . .	—	26	6th M.G. Coy. . .	—	9	7th M.G. Coy. . .	2	18
5th L.T.M. Bty. . .	1	15	6th L.T.M. Bty. . .	—	2	7th L.T.M. Bty. . .	2	14
5th Fld. Amb. . .	1	9	6th Fld. Amb. . .	—	6	7th Fld. Amb. . .	—	6
	45	979		11	328		34	696
Artillery . . .	4	60	Engrs. . .	1	11	22nd M.G. Coy. . .	1	7
Med. & Heavy T.M. . .	—	7	2nd Div. Sig. Coy. . .	2	17	2nd Pioneer Bn. . .	3	50
						Provost Corps . .	—	3

In addition, the casualties in the heavy artillery operating with the corps were 11 officers and 228 other ranks, the 13th Light Horse lost 1 officer and 8 others; 1st Aust. Tunnelling Coy., 1 and 19; Canadian Tunnelling Coys., 1 and 27.

<sup>170</sup> Even in reserve in the old support positions, behind Chateau Wood and at Halfway House, the 3rd Battalion suffered considerable loss.

<sup>171</sup> *Schlachten des Welt Krieges*, Vol. 27, pp. 117-8.

the other hand, the feeling of the British troops after their early relief is exhibited in the words of a young officer of the 8th Battalion:

Had a good march out. If only every attack could be carried through so cleanly and (followed by) relief so quick, the men would be well content.

In spite of the fact that the German barrage had fairly caught half of the 1st Division assembling, there had never been any failure of determination. Throughout this fighting the troops when under bombardment pressed forward in order to get out of it, a procedure always urged by commanders on both sides, but not always followed. Among Australian troops the chief criticism heard after the fight was that they "could have done it in half the time," and with less expenditure of ammunition.

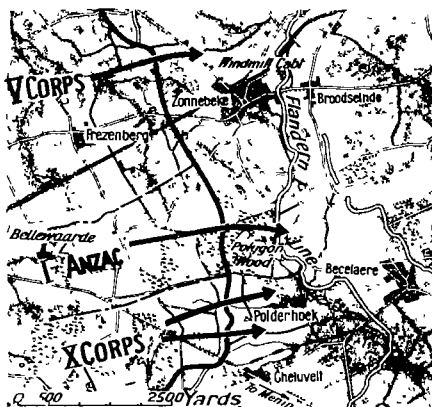
This success differed from all others in which Australians had yet participated, in that it was part of a well planned series of operations leading definitely towards victory in the war. But, though it caused some rejoicing in England and France, its real importance was probably underrated there; earlier failures had caused the people to be cautious, and the governments sceptical. Lord Bertie, British Ambassador in Paris, noted in his diary: "We have done a good offensive which is much appreciated. But will it lead to anything really important?"



## CHAPTER XIX

### SECOND STEP—POLYGON WOOD

THE second step was taken on September 26th. I Anzac, having still the principal task, closed slightly northwards so as to continue to direct its right up the main ridge, and at the same time to narrow its front to 2,100 yards.<sup>1</sup> The X Corps, which took over from the I Anzac right the northern side of the Reutelbeek Valley, would now protect the flank of the advance by attacking along the southern slope of the main ridge as well as on the Polderhoek spur. Of the Fifth Army, the V Corps and part of the XVIII would also attack, the Fifth Army's objective including Zonnebeke "village" and part of the important Windmill Cabaret spur, that left the main ridge at Broodseinde and crossed the plain north-westwards. On the extreme southern flank the X Corps would seize the still uncaptured part of Tower Hamlets spur.



The new operation involved the moving forward of almost the whole of the massed artillery. But the battlefield had been so churned up by the artillery of both sides that, from the old front lines eastwards, the moving of guns was entirely impossible until tracks of some sort—roads, or railways, or both—had been made. Military opinion at this time favoured light railways,<sup>2</sup> which could be quickly laid and could swiftly

<sup>1</sup> Its front had increased as the result of the first step.

<sup>2</sup> The British light railways were said to be now carrying thirteen times as much material as at the beginning of 1917.

transport large stocks of ammunition. Road-making necessitated the provision of immense amounts of material. On the crater-field, plank roads were the only ones that could be quickly constructed for heavy traffic. The scheme of Birdwood's chief engineer, Brigadier-General Joly de Lotbinière, provided for roads, railways, mule-tracks, even for a short experimental length of monorail.<sup>3</sup> The work upon these was the first condition of progress in the step-by-step battle, and it was therefore fully recognised as being, in some respects, the most important in the whole of the Anzac operations. Forward of Ypres the task was divided into three sections. Behind the original battle-front it was supervised by the corps engineer staff, which employed the engineers and pioneers of the resting divisions,<sup>4</sup> the 1st Australian and 1st Canadian Tunnelling Companies, and certain British troops.<sup>5</sup> Forward, the work was divided between the two divisions in the line.

The works-scheme of I Anzac had been launched on September 7th when, with the 47th British Division still holding the front, pioneers and engineers of the 1st, 2nd, and 5th Australian Divisions began to take up their tasks. Eventually the pioneers and tunnellers were mainly concentrated upon the construction of plank roads, the engineers upon the light railways, and the British army-troops and labour companies upon the repair, first of metalled roads, and later of the plank ones also.<sup>6</sup> In spite of heavy shelling, this scheme made very quick headway. The light railway system that left the broad-gauge at Ypres, and had been extended by the 47th Division to near Bellewaarde Lake, was hurried on by Australian engineers to Bellewaarde Ridge, and another branch to the south of Hooze. For the future road-service of the artillery, two main circuits were planned, one behind the original British front and one in advance of it. For the former, the Menin and Verbrandenmolen roads, with two transverse roads from Zillebeke to Hellfire Corner and

<sup>3</sup> Of the "fence" type, 5 ft. 6 in. high, carrying a single rail and two rubbing strips.

<sup>4</sup> Those of the 4th Division, however, were excluded during the first stage, in order to avoid breaking into their short rest.

<sup>5</sup> Two labour companies and four army troops companies, R.E., which had been serving with the II Corps.

<sup>6</sup> See Vol. XII, plates 390-1, 408-9, 417-9



42. PART OF THE I ANZAC SYSTEM OF COMMUNICATIONS NEAR BIRR CROSS-ROAD.

The view is from the Menin road and shows the planked by-pass near Birr Cross-road, trucks on the light railway leading north of Bellewaarde Lake, a duckboard track, and a party of the 56th Battalion making, under supervision of the 14th Field Company, with pioneers, a planked siding for the Birr Cross engineer dump.

*First War Memorial Official Photo No E4613  
Taken on 25th October, 1917.*

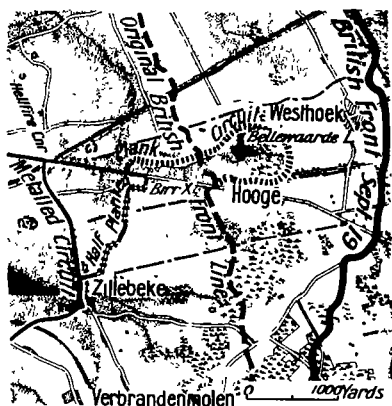
*To face p 792*



43 THE SCENE AT HOOZE DUMP ON 25TH SEPTEMBER 1917, AFTER ITS EXPLOSION

In the foreground are the chassis of two burnt motor-lorries. A third and fourth less damaged, are beyond the smouldering debris

Birr Cross-Road respectively, were chosen, and nearly the whole construction force under the corps staff was put upon these, under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel E. J. H. Nicholson.<sup>7</sup> At least half of the track, a mile long, from Zillebeke to Birr Cross-Road, had been so destroyed that it had to be remade as a plank road, and on this, the most urgent task in that area, the 5th Division's pioneers—and, for two days, some of the 1st Division's—were employed. The work was finished by September 19th, an outstanding achievement even for those troops.



The forward circuit had to be provided in the crater-field from Birr Cross-Road eastward, in which the lines of old roads were barely traceable. A new plank road, 3,200 yards long, was therefore planned, leading from the Menin road, short of Hooze, through Chateau Wood, northward around the Bellewaarde Lake,<sup>8</sup> and back through Cambridge Road to the Menin road at Birr Cross. The 1st Pioneers undertook the southern part, and the 2nd Pioneers the northern.<sup>9</sup> While the work was under way, General White, in order to avoid probable overcrowding at Birr Cross-Road, arranged that the northern track should be prolonged to join the Menin road 200 yards farther back. This by-pass, though only 300 yards long, lay on swampy ground, and its construction involved great difficulty.

But the main difficulty was the carriage of planks. Later, when the routine was perfected, there arrived at Ouderdom

<sup>7</sup> The 47th Division also worked upon them.

<sup>8</sup> "Idiot Corner," the bend north-west of the lake, was so called from "Idiot Trench," near by.

<sup>9</sup> About 500 yards of the circuit lay along the old track through Chateau Wood. It was thought that the existence of the road formation would assist the 1st Division's pioneers, and they were accordingly allotted more than half of the total task. The state of the track, however, and the vicious shelling of that area, neutralised any advantage.

siding (4½ miles from Ypres) at 2 p.m. daily a special train containing 240 tons of planks. Eighty motor lorries drew up beside the train; each took three tons of planks, carried them at dusk through Ypres, out along the Menin road, and threw them off on the roadside between Hellfire Corner and Birr Cross-Road. As soon as these lorries were clear of Ypres on their return journey, 120 two-horse waggons<sup>10</sup> drove out through the city to this roadside dump, and each there loaded 13 planks and took them to the nearest attainable point for the working parties. Two journeys were made by the waggons before the approach of daylight, when they returned through Ypres. Meanwhile pioneers, engineers, or tunnellers carried the planks to the road-head.<sup>11</sup>

The circuit roads had to be made whatever the cost. The forward one lay in ground always heavily shelled, frequently with mustard gas, and the shelling increased when the German airmen, as they quickly did, observed the new roads. In the early stages the pioneers constantly suffered from small burns due to the mustard oil which, hanging about the shell-holes, clung to their clothing. These minor hurts were soon avoided by changing clothes on return to camp near Ypres, but the drain of more serious casualties continued steadily. Particularly trying was the duty of the transport drivers. Strings of waggons had to carry the planks slowly along the narrow, mainly one-way, roads. When, as often happened, the track was shelled, and a length of it destroyed by direct hits, while the breach was being repaired the drivers had to sit, each on his high perch, controlling his horses, while the shells struck home on or around the crowded traffic. Other than Australian transport was seldom used for this work; the superiority of the Australian drivers for it was most evident. They belonged to the finest class their nation produced, unassuming, country-bred men. They waited steadily until the break was repaired or some shattered wagon or horses

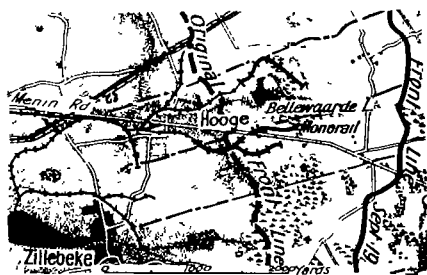
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<sup>10</sup> Usually from the transport of resting Australian divisions.

<sup>11</sup> The planks were chiefly elm or beech, 8 or 10 feet long, 9 inches or a foot wide, and 2½ inches thick. They were laid on four or five longitudinal runners sunk in the earthen road formation, which was 18-20 feet wide with ditches on either side. Each plank was bolted to the runners, and was further secured along each edge of the track by pine logs laid longitudinally on top of the planks. These logs also helped to keep vehicles on the road.

dragged from the road, and then continued their vital work. No shell-fire could drive them from their horses. The unostentatious efficiency and self-discipline of these steadfast men was as fine as any achievement of Australians in the war.

As the date of the first step-by-step offensive approached, work was increasingly concentrated on these roads, and by September 19th both forward tracks were ready,<sup>12</sup> although nearly half-a-mile of planking was still required to finish the loop. Although the light railways also had quickly advanced, it was already being found that on this battlefield they were much less useful than the roads. The constant breaks in them through shell-fire were much more difficult to repair. For the forwarding of engineer stores they proved in practice almost useless.



*Railways laid by I Anzac before Sept. 19 are shown in thick black.*

As the Bellewaarde railway actually ran beside the plank road, an attempt was made to bring planks by the train, but it did not get them past Hellfire Corner.

On September 20th the new road system was practically in full use. The field artillery moved immediately to Bellewaarde and Hooze.<sup>13</sup> An effort to pass a few heavier pieces along the earthen mule-track south of Hooze failed, but during that night and the following morning the 5th Pioneers, hurriedly summoned, turned the track into a plank road.<sup>14</sup> These efforts made possible the second step of September 26th; and, while the artillery was carrying out the preparation for that attack, the engineer services were constructing a still more advanced plank circuit and railways to Westhoek Ridge and Glencorse Wood, a preliminary for the third and still more important step that would follow.

<sup>12</sup> By putting its pioneers on the earth work, and the 7th Field Company on the planking, the 2nd Division joined its road formation to that of the 1st Division on that date.

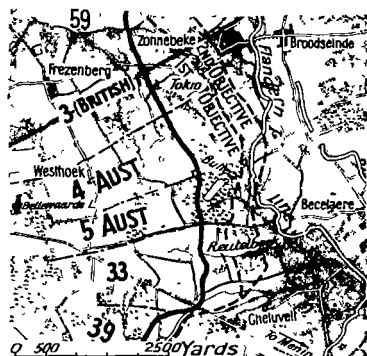
<sup>13</sup> See Vol. XII, plate 380

<sup>14</sup> The 5th Pioneers had been called out at 11 p.m. on Sept. 20. At noon, Sept. 21, they handed over the work to the 1st Aust. Tunnelling Coy. to finish.

The artillery preparations for the second step were closely similar to those for the first.<sup>15</sup> The attack would secure most of the remaining eastward bend of the ridge, including the whole of Polygon Wood, the Butte, and part of the German "Flandern I" line. North of this the objective would lie along the Tokio Spur as far as Zonnebeke. This was the last spur between I Anzac and the northward curve of the main ridge to Broodseinde. The Broodseinde crest would be attacked in the next and most important step of the series, not later than October 6th.

**Plans for  
Sept. 26**

On September 26th I Anzac was to advance 1,000-1,200 yards deep, on a front of 2,100 yards at the start, but 2,750 at the objective. It would attack in two stages, first, an advance to the Butte and Tokio, 800-900 yards from the present front; second, after a pause of about an hour, a short further thrust to beyond the Flandern I line on the crest and to Tokio Spur<sup>16</sup> on the flats. On the Second Army's front the barrage would descend at "zero" hour and advance at the same rates as on September 20th, but on the Fifth Army's front there would be two hours' bombardment before zero. The I Anzac artillery was the same as before,<sup>17</sup> but the infantry and attendant units were changed, the 5th and 4th Divisions relieving the 1st and 2nd on the nights of September 22nd and 23rd. Each division would, as before, attack with two brigades, and each brigade would attack its first objective with one battalion and its second with two. The harder task, on the main ridge, was



<sup>15</sup> There was, however, more wire to be cut and therefore less ammunition for practice barrages. Nevertheless, there were to be two of these daily at different hours on Sept. 23, 24, and 25.

<sup>16</sup> Tokio blockhouse itself, however, was within the first objective.

<sup>17</sup> The creeping barrage of the machine-guns was provided by 56 guns, except at its farthest stages, in which the 64 "S.O.S." guns (forward at Anzac Ridge and Glencorse Wood) took it up instead. To deceive the enemy into believing that the real barrage was a practice one, the machine-guns did not fire until 7 minutes after zero.



given to the 5th Division, which came fresh from four months' rest. The 4th, which had been withdrawn from the front line at Messines a little over three weeks before, would attack the Tokio Spur. In this division Major-General Sinclair-MacLagan,<sup>18</sup> who had succeeded Holmes, decided to attack with his 4th and 13th Brigades; General Hobbs, of the 5th Division, attacked with his two most experienced brigades: the hardest task, on the right flank, he allotted to the 15th (Victoria) under Brigadier-General Elliott, who had special qualities for a tough fight; the attack on the Butte fell to the 14th (N.S.W.), under a careful, level-headed British regular, Brigadier-General Hobkirk.



Hobkirk arranged that all his battalions to take part in the attack should previously have held the line and thus become acquainted with the ground.<sup>19</sup> In the 15th Brigade and both brigades of the 4th Division, the front would be held, until the morning of the attack, by a battalion which would not take part in the actual assault. In these brigades the attack-battalions sent forward officers and N.C.O's, during the days before the operation, to reconnoitre. As before, the information supplied by the intelligence staff was ample. The attack had been well practised in the back area. The 5th Division had also maintained close *liaison* with the 1st throughout the fighting of the first step, the whole division following those operations almost as if they were its own.

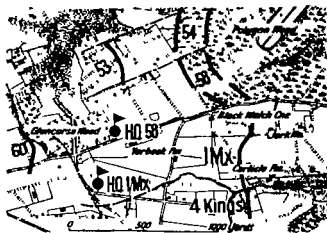
Since September 21st the front had been comparatively quiet.<sup>20</sup> On the main ridge the enemy was in many places 500 yards away, and patrols even reached the neighbourhood

<sup>18</sup> The commander of the 3rd Brigade at the Landing.

<sup>19</sup> The 56th and 55th (destined to attack the 14th Brigade's second objective) came into the line on the night of Sept. 22, taking over from the 1st Brigade (1st Divn) the whole divisional front on the ridge. On the following night the 58th Battalion (15th Brigade) took over the right half of this front from the 56th, which became support battalion for its brigade in the old Red Line at Nonne Bosschen. The 55th and 56th were withdrawn on Sept. 24-25 for twenty-four hours' rest, their places being taken by the 54th (front line) and 53rd (support). The 53rd was to attack the first objective.

<sup>20</sup> On the morning of Sept. 23, however, the Germans shelled viciously part of the front in Polygon Wood.

of the Butte.<sup>21</sup> On the Tokio front the 121st German Division was found to have been relieved by the 3rd Reserve, which contained a large sprinkling of Poles, some of them not unfriendly to the Allies and even eager to be captured.<sup>22</sup> The night of the 24th, on which, south of the Anzac sector, the 33rd British Division relieved the 23rd, was disturbed by intermittent shelling, and, by Australian officers on the flank concerned, this relief was long afterwards recalled as one of the least satisfactory within their experience. The incoming British brigade, the 98th, was to attack on September 26th north of the Reutelbeek. Its front (part of that seized by the 2nd Australian Brigade on September 20th) lay ahead of "Carlisle Farm," with supports about the farm ruins (in the old "Green Line"), and a reserve position 250 yards in rear, about Lone House (the old "Blue Line"). The British battalion headquarters were near Fitzclarence Farm, and those of the neighbouring 58th (Victoria) Battalion near Verbeek Farm. This country had been shorn of almost every landmark except the scattered blockhouses half-sunk in the ploughed-up crater-field, but along the northern edge of the valley there was traceable a winding thread that had once been the metalled road to Reutel village on the main height at the lower end of the valley. This road was now the boundary between I Anzac and the X Corps. The latter was responsible for its tenure, but maintained no post within a considerable distance of it. Lieutenant Boyd,<sup>23</sup> commanding the flank company of the 58th, had on September 24th obtained from the nearest officers of the 8th York and Lancaster a promise that the gap should be



<sup>21</sup> One account states that Capt. F. J. Cotterell (Sydney and Cook's Hill, N.S.W.) of the 55th wanted to examine the Butte itself, and was only dissuaded by the urgent advice of his N.C.O's. On the 15th Brigade's front one pillbox, a quarter of a mile distant, was to be raided on the night of Sept. 24 by a party under Lieut. E. A. O'Malley (Quorn, S. Aust.), but owing to the activity of the artillery the project was countermanded.

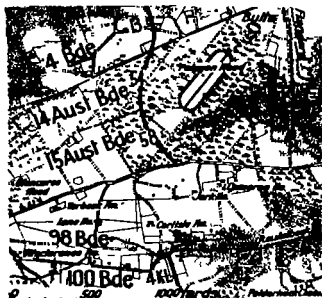
<sup>22</sup> Early on Sept. 23 the 23rd Battalion saw three men enter a pillbox 100 yards ahead of it. A patrol crept out and captured them. At 7 o'clock three more came up, apparently to relieve the first party. The patrol captured these also. The prisoners belonged to the 49th RIR (3rd Reserve Division). Next day another nine were taken by the 13th Battalion, which had relieved the 23rd.

<sup>23</sup> Lieut. H. J. Boyd, M.C.; 58th Bn. Dental surgeon; of Bendigo and Sandringham, Vic., b. Bendigo, 24 April, 1886.

filled. That night, finding that this had not been done, Boyd several times sent across, and finally went to the English post himself. Apparently, after his return, a party of the Middlesex was sent to fill the gap; but meanwhile he had ordered Lieutenant Flintoft<sup>24</sup> to extend the 58th's right. Part of the flank platoon, under Sergeant Colclough,<sup>25</sup> after digging all night, obtained fair command of the interval between the Australian right and the knoll on which the British flank lay. During the night, until early morning, some German patrol much closer than usual was firing flares and working a machine-gun opposite this sector.

September 25th, like the four previous days, broke beautifully fine but hazy. Throughout the back areas final preparations for tomorrow's great stroke were in swing. At the front there were to be two practice barrages, at 6.30 by the whole artillery of the army, lasting an hour, and at 8.30 for 18 minutes by the I Anzac guns. The German artillery was active earlier, and at 5.30 the S.O.S. signal was seen to go up on the X Corps left and the Anzac right.<sup>26</sup> This was not an uncommon occurrence, and no anxiety was felt by the senior staffs; but the forward headquarters, themselves heavily shelled and looking out into the dust and smoke of a severe and incessant German barrage, waited tensely for news. At 7.15 out of this turmoil a pigeon arrived at the loft of the incoming 33rd British Division, with a message that the enemy had seized part of the front line of its southern sector on the Menin road. This was far to the right of the Australians; it was not until 8.46 that news reached Brigadier-General Elliott of the 15th Australian Brigade at Hooge

**Sept. 25—The  
Headquarters'  
view**



<sup>24</sup> Lieut. W. Flintoft, 58th Bn. Clerk; of South Yarra, Vic.; b. South Yarra, 20 March, 1889.

<sup>25</sup> Lieut. J. J. G. Colclough, D.C.M.; 58th Bn. Grazier; of Meredith, Vic.; b. Ascot Vale, Vic., 18 Oct., 1883.

<sup>26</sup> See Vol XII, plate 381.

crater that his flank was involved, the Germans having driven back the 1st Middlesex and established machine-guns on the road which was the boundary between the corps. The breach was only between Polygon Wood and the Reutelbeek. South of the valley the 4th King's (Liverpool Regiment) had not budged.

Seeing that twelve hours later the jumping-off tapes must be laid on the ground now commanded by the enemy, and the brigades must assemble there for the next day's offensive, the immediate restoration of the line was of the first importance. General Hobbs of the 5th Division was then actually on his way to a conference at Elliott's headquarters at Hooze, but such was the German barrage on the Menin road that at 200 yards from Elliott's headquarters he had to turn back. Geysers of earth were springing from the country on either side, raising a dust-cloud through which succeeding explosions were faintly visible.<sup>27</sup> Aeroplanes were bombing. The advanced divisional dump of ammunition for the next day's attack had been blown up, and cartridges and bombs were littered on all sides; several motor lorries had been wrecked on the Menin road, and one was blazing fiercely. To Elliott's headquarters in this inferno messages penetrated with difficulty. But word came from Major Freeman,<sup>28</sup> acting in command of the 58th, that he was throwing in one of his two support companies, and asking for reinforcement. This could only be given from one of the battalions that would attack next day. Of these the 60th, destined for the first objective, was at Clapham Junction; the 57th and 59th, allotted for the second objective, were at "Zouave Wood" (three-quarters of a mile back) and Zillebeke Bund (3 miles back) respectively. A company of the 60th Battalion and two of the 57th were already engaged in carrying, and, in this bombardment, were likely to suffer loss. The making of further drafts on these battalions might upset tomorrow's arrangements, but Elliott was not prone to hesitation. That his line should hold, and the line on his flank be restored, seemed a vital condition for tomorrow's attack, and he

<sup>27</sup> Many this day observed with admiration the famous pair of official photographers, Captain Frank Hurley and Lieut. G. H. (later Sir Hubert) Wilkins, recklessly exposing themselves on the Menin road to secure a record of this bombardment.

<sup>28</sup> Brig. N. M. Freeman, D.S.O. Commanded 31st Bn., 1918/19. Barrister and solicitor; of Geelong, Vic., b. Geelong, 21 April, 1890.

immediately decided that whatever support was asked he must give.<sup>20</sup> He accordingly ordered the 60th to send a company.

The same barrage that was flaying Glencorse Wood was rendering communication almost impossible on the 33rd Division's front. The commander of the 98th Brigade was at first uncertain whether to use, for counter-attack, troops destined for the next day's offensive. The divisional commander, however, ordered him to do so, and to restore his lost front, acting in co-operation with the 15th Australian Brigade. The brigadier accordingly at 9.40 allotted two companies of his support battalion, the 2nd Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, to assist the 1st Middlesex in the counter-attack, and sent them up to Fitzclarence Farm.<sup>21</sup>

News of this decision reaching Elliott at 10.40, he forthwith gave a verbal order for the despatch of a second company of the 60th. He was, at the time, holding a conference with the commanders of the three battalions for next day's attack,<sup>22</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel Marshall (60th), Lieutenant-Colonel Stewart (57th), and Lieutenant-Colonel Mason (59th). Elliott's battalion commanders were now mostly men of his own selection, known to him since their subaltern days, and enjoying his complete trust. Mason, the newest of this trio, was a Melbourne barrister, a man of courage and of fine ideals. The senior was Stewart, a cool, experienced, and trusted officer, trained in the old militia, who as adjutant of the original 5th Battalion had, for a time, commanded it at the Anzac Landing.<sup>23</sup> Norman Marshall of the 60th had risen from a private in the public schools' company of the 5th. Son of the minister of Scots Church, Melbourne, with a keen, merry nature and a great athletic record, he had been a natural leader since his school-days.<sup>24</sup> At the boxing contests which he encouraged among his officers, he would himself "take on" any of them. He played football with the brigade team. Returning on horseback from a merry

<sup>20</sup> Lieuts R. H. Hooper, J. E. Keating, and C. A. Deane of the 58th, unknown to Major Freeman, sent word to Elliott by Deane asking for a company in support. "A company, my boy," replied Elliott. "You shall have the whole of the 60th." (Hooper belonged to King Island, Tas.; Keating to North West Mooroopna, Vic.; and Deane to Nagambie, Vic.)

<sup>21</sup> One of these companies had already been given to the Middlesex at 7.55 a.m.

<sup>22</sup> To explain the operation order, which had been delayed.

<sup>23</sup> See Vol. I, p. 399.

<sup>24</sup> He had been amateur middle-weight boxing champion of Victoria.

dinner at some *estaminet* reputed for its omelettes or its brews, he had been known, if the moon was bright, to lead his company commanders straight across country, over ditches and hedges.<sup>84</sup> Modest withal, it is little wonder that Marshall was a hero in the A.I.F. Elliott's belief in him was unbounded. In the present tight corner, the mere knowledge that Norman Marshall was in charge would give confidence to all Australians who were aware of the fact. It was arranged at the conference that, if the last company of the 60th had to be sent forward, he should go with it and take control.

The conference had just broken up when word arrived from the 98th Brigade that its advance to recapture the lost line would take place at 2 o'clock, the infantry being ordered to hurry forward to the barrage and advance with it at 2.3. Elliott at once sent Marshall a written order to send up another company and counter-attack, in conjunction with the British, from the Australian flank. By a natural mistake, Marshall understood this to be the usual written confirmation of the previous verbal instruction to send the second company, and, while Elliott supposed him to have gone forward, he remained with his last company at Clapham Junction anxiously awaiting a further order. At the same time Elliott had ordered the 57th to replace the 60th at Clapham Junction, and the 59th to move to Zouave Wood.

The forward area was all day fogged with heavy bombardment, and the higher staffs never knew, then or afterwards, what happened there. At 4.55 General Hobbs of the 5th Division heard from the 33rd Division's artillery staff that the counter-attack had not taken place. Its general staff, however, said that at 2.45 p.m. the 98th Brigade had been seen approaching its old front line. At 5.8 the 33rd Division reported its front line retaken, and this statement eventually found its way into the Commander-in-Chief's despatches. But from the Australian troops came no news of their flank being in touch with the British, and at 5.40 Major Freeman (58th) reported "large numbers" of the enemy assembling at "Cameron House," a collection of

<sup>84</sup> "No matter how 'thick' the night had been," wrote one of them (Major D. B. Doyle) long afterwards in *Reveille*, "everybody would be on parade next morning, and no excuses would be expected."

farm ruins and pillboxes opposite the British left and Australian right. Without support on its right, he said, the 58th could not hold.

Elliott naturally supposed this to be the crisis of the day. He asked for a barrage to protect the flank, and now, discovering the mistake as to the last company of the 60th, sent it forward. At 6.28 he reported the Germans counter-attacking, the 58th hard pressed, and Marshall in charge.

To Marshall himself on going forward, it seemed almost certain that the enemy intended to attack at dusk. German aeroplanes were flying low, shooting at the troops; the barrage was so heavy that it was almost impossible to bring up reserves.

Position appears bad (he wrote). . . . Idea of putting out tapes under present conditions is absolutely impossible. Consider you should insist on British brigade on our right retaking their front line at once.

Half-an-hour later Elliott received from the 98th Brigade the alarming report that its troops were back on the line of Verbeek Farm, 750 yards behind the alignment of his right front posts.<sup>38</sup> A withdrawal of the Australian right was being discussed.

Such were the reported events upon which leaders had to base their decisions. As the chief crisis of the day seemed at this juncture to have arrived, Elliott now sent forward Colonel Stewart with the 57th. Stewart would take charge on arrival, and the 59th would be brought to Clapham Junction to await his call. All the brigade's machine-guns were put at his disposal.

The actual events of this day, however, were so materially different from those reported that a separate account of them must be given. The true story can be most clearly told by interposing the relevant portions of the German narrative.

**Sept. 25—The  
front-line view**

On Sept. 23 Crown Prince Rupprecht apprehended that the British might seize the heights of Zonnebeke and Gheluvelt at their next step. If such an attack came, it was imperative that this time the German counter-attack system, which had failed on Sept. 20, should succeed. But (Prince Rupprecht wrote on Sept. 24) "it is to be hoped the new attacks will not follow too quickly, as we have not sufficient reserves behind the front of the main offensive."

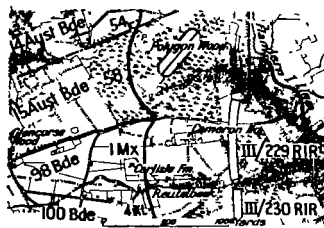
<sup>38</sup> This was a mistake. The two companies of the Argyll and Sutherland and a remnant of the Middlesex were next day found on the Lone House line (*see p. 818*).

His immediate measure was the obvious one of striking at the British flank prolonged by the last attack. The counter-attack of Sept. 25 was undertaken upon his order, and, according to the reports that first reached him, it succeeded. "The next enemy major attack will presumably not follow until after a few days," he noted; and on the same day he went to Munich to attend to urgent personal affairs.

The attack was delivered by the Wyttschaete Corps, employing the 50th Reserve (Prussian) Division, which had relieved the Bavarian Ersatz.<sup>36</sup> The 50th Reserve attacked, in the first instance, with one battalion in each of its regimental sectors—the III/229th R.I.R. north of the Reutelbeek, and the III/230th R.I.R. south of it, and troops of the storm battalion of the Fourth Army on the Menin road, in the sector of the 231st R.I.R. The objective was practically the whole of the Wilhelm Line opposite the sector of the Wyttschaete Corps, from the Reutel road, south of Polygon Wood (which also happened to be the southern boundary of I Anzac) to the Menin road. The commander of the 229th R.I.R. warned his division that its object could not be attained without the most minute preparation, and the participation of the Ypres Corps opposite Polygon Wood. This last, however, was not permitted. The attack was postponed for a day, and its control was given to the commander of the 230th R.I.R. (Major Litzmann).

It was afterwards stated in the intelligence summary of the Second British Army that the artillery supporting this counter-attack constituted "by far the greatest concentration of artillery on any one enemy divisional sector which has ever been recorded, and represents nearly four times the normal allotment to one division."<sup>37</sup> The attacking battalions assembled during the night of the 24th with little loss, part of the line battalions creeping out to cover them. The massed artillery laid down its barrage at 5.15 a.m.

According to German accounts, sheaves of red flares, instantly arising, informed the German artillery that its barrage was falling on its own infantry, especially on the III/230th, south of the Reutelbeek. The troops had to be brought farther back, and consequently at 5.30, when the barrage lengthened and the infantry advanced, the start was not altogether a good one.



At the beginning of this barrage, the two front companies of the 58th Australian Battalion, in the south-western edge of Polygon Wood, saw the enemy advancing in numerous small "worm" columns 500 yards away,<sup>38</sup> the first appearance of Germans in strength for several days. At 5.30, receiving immediate word of the enemy's advance, the right-company commander, Lieutenant Boyd, fired the S.O.S. signal, led

<sup>36</sup> The 16th Bavarian Division had been thrown in simply as a counter-attack division, and immediately afterwards withdrawn.

<sup>37</sup> There were available 44 field and 20 heavy batteries.

<sup>38</sup> As with the British, these were covered by a thin screen of skirmishers.



his support platoons forward from Black Watch Corner, and from that time onward took charge of the 58th's front line on the crucial flank. The I Anzac barrage came down within 15 seconds of the call for it, but it fell between the advanced Germans and their supports. Steady fire had been opened at 400 yards, but as the Germans streamed down the slight spur on which lay Cameron House, 300 yards away, every rifle and Lewis gun was pouring bullets into them. The Germans continued to advance behind the broken hedges bordering the Reutel road. The line of the 1st Middlesex on the right of the 58th retired. At 5.55 the Germans made an attempt in close order to rush the Australian flank, but the fire was too hot. After twice renewing the effort, they desisted, but a party held on in a shell-crater from which they threw egg-bombs into the right-flank post. A well-placed rifle-grenade sent three German helmets flying, and ended this trouble.<sup>39</sup> The main body of the enemy in this neighbourhood had been stopped 100 yards away. Low-flying German airmen fired white flares informing their artillery as to the position.

German accounts show that the troops who came actually against the 58th were the 4th company of the I/229th R.I.R., whose duty was to form a flank keeping touch with the southern regiment of the Ypres Corps (49th R.I.R.). The supports visible farther back were the 9th company of the III/229th, which at this stage the battalion commander, Major Hethey, retained behind his northern flank. The German contact airmen then flying over are said to have ascertained the position of their line and, within ten minutes, reported it to headquarters of the Wytschaete Group.

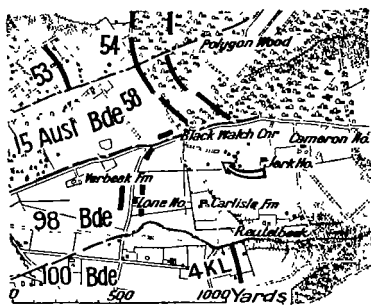
Seeing that the German advance was strongest on his right, Boyd placed his last platoon there, to watch the gap between himself and the British. At 6.10 a man of the Middlesex came in, and said that the Germans were in the Middlesex front line close on the right. As the enemy had now also established a line of machine-guns along the Reutel road, Boyd swung his right to face the road, and, farther back, placed along it two weak platoons of Lieutenant Tasker's<sup>40</sup> company for which at 6.15 he had asked Major Freeman. Seeing the Germans now creeping towards the Middlesex support line, he asked for the two remaining

<sup>39</sup> Sgt. Colclough had himself crept out to bomb this position, but could not get close enough. On his way back to his post three Germans passed him. He jumped out and bayoneted one, and then, flinging himself down to avoid machine-gun fire, shot the two others.

<sup>40</sup> Lieut. E. W. Tasker, 58th Bn. Commercial traveller; of Seymour, Vic.; b. Ballarat, Vic., 20 April, 1880.

platoons. The German barrage was then at its heaviest, but Lieutenants Rosenthal<sup>41</sup> and Kennedy Smith<sup>42</sup> at once set out with them (as Boyd afterwards reported) "in grand style," heading, two or three men at a time, straight through the shell-fire. Smith was killed by a shell at once, and Rosenthal by a machine-gun just as, in great spirits, he reached Boyd. The platoons, arriving with few casualties, were lined farther to the right rear with Lieutenant Tasker in charge. From the left Lieutenant O'Malley,<sup>43</sup> confident that he could hold, was assisting with fire. Boyd believed his line could resist until the Middlesex should counter-attack. A company of the 60th had been asked for.

From 9 o'clock for an hour there was a lull. The two practice barrages, duly fired, had fallen behind the attacking Germans, but the British shelling was now well placed. At 10 the Germans were seen working forward from a fortified ruin, "Jerk House," just down the slope from the 58th's flank, to several pillboxes, farther back on the prominent mound 150 yards behind the right of the 58th, in the sector of the 1st Middlesex.



The Stokes mortars under Lieutenant Gamble,<sup>44</sup> shooting at these Germans, were running short of shells. The 58th was now shot at from behind its flank; and from the enemy's rear a body of grey-uniformed troops was seen advancing in close order. Fire was turned upon them.

This really was the second and last crisis of the day.

The history of the 229th R.I.R. shows that Major Hethey, in charge of the attack north of the Reutelbeek, had come forward to Jerk House, brought his 9th company across to reinforce his centre, and at 10 o'clock

<sup>41</sup> Lieut. S. Rosenthal, 58th Bn Mercer; of St. Kilda, Vic., b. Melbourne, 27 Nov., 1881. Killed in action, 25 Sept., 1917.

<sup>42</sup> Lieut. L. Kennedy Smith, 58th Bn. Bank clerk; of Bairnsdale, Vic.; b. Bairnsdale, 10 Dec., 1888. Killed in action, 25 Sept., 1917.

<sup>43</sup> Lieut. E. A. O'Malley, M.C.; 58th Bn Draughtsman; of Quorn, S. Aust.; b. Port Adelaide, 24 March, 1893.

<sup>44</sup> Capt. W. M. F. Gamble, M.C.; 15th L.T.M. Bty. Student; of Ararat and Kew, Vic.; b. Edinburgh, 26 Nov., 1890.

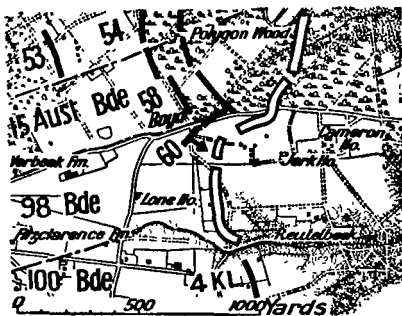
set his attack again in motion. Two companies of the II/229th had been given to him, but he had not yet used them, having at 11 o'clock secured his whole objective.

South of the Reutelbeek, on the other hand, the III/230th R.I.R. had met marshy ground. Immediately south of the stream (against the 4th King's Liverpool Regiment) it made no headway at all. The storm battalion had penetrated at the Menin road, but was driven back by an early counter-attack. From prisoners the Germans learned that a British offensive would be launched next day.

It was at this juncture that the 58th received warning of the Middlesex counter-attack, projected for 2 o'clock, with which the 60th would co-operate. At noon the 60th were sighted, and a message arrived from Colonel Marshall: "Hang on at all costs." At 12.30 a company of the 60th arrived, coming at a steady double. Its leader, Lieutenant Cahill,<sup>46</sup> was wounded, but Lieutenant Wellington,<sup>46</sup> hearing from Boyd of the attack order, lined his men in readiness on the right flank. There also arrived two platoons of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, specially sent to make touch. The flank was extended with these back past Black Watch Corner.

Two o'clock, however, came without discernible sign of either barrage or attack. At 2.3, as ordered, Lieutenant Wellington's line began to advance from shell-hole to shell-hole, covered by Gamble's trench-mortars, driving back the Germans. No British being visible there, Boyd presently stopped the advance and sought touch with the Middlesex. A sergeant and 8 men of that battalion were found on Wellington's right.<sup>47</sup>

About this time, though Boyd did not hear of it, Australians far on the right rear saw two companies of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders advancing down the head of the valley. They were unprotected by any barrage, and in full view of the Germans, who were

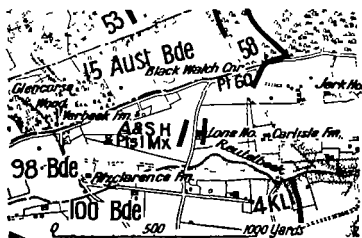


<sup>46</sup> Lieut. M. Cahill, M.C.; 60th Bn. Bank clerk; of Stawell, Vic.; b. Stawell, 28 Sept., 1881.

<sup>47</sup> Lieut. C. G. Wellington, 60th Bn. Clerk; of Wayville, S. Aust.; b. Yongala, S. Aust., 26 March, 1896.

<sup>48</sup> Apparently these were the post previously stationed in the gap.

pelting them with bullets and shells. But they came steadily onwards in two lines. The leading line passed Lone House, south-west of Black Watch Corner, cutting off a small party of Germans. Together with a few of the Middlesex, whom it had picked up, it dug in there, the second line stopping 100 yards behind.<sup>48</sup> The order to attack had reached these troops only a few minutes before, and the creeping barrage, if there was one, had by this time gone far ahead. Their messages, now sent, asking for another barrage to be arranged, did not reach headquarters, and the line remained at Lone House, 350 yards behind the Australian flank. A few of the 58th could see them, but their location was unknown both to their own and to the Australian command.



The German attack had really ended at 11, but the strain was now telling on both sides. The enemy's airmen, patrolling at will, had detected the advance of the Australian flank, and German ground observers saw the constant moving up of reserves through Glencorse Wood and shelled it unmercifully, causing very heavy loss.<sup>49</sup> The thrust-out flank also was shelled, and, seeing the enemy still concentrated at Cameron House, Boyd proposed to withdraw it. Freeman ordered him to postpone this step until 5, waiting for a possible British attack. At that hour, as dusk was approaching and the enemy still threatening, the flank was drawn back, moving by twos and threes so as to avoid any appearance of a rout.

It was in this situation, amid a furious cannonade by both sides, that Marshall and his last company arrived. Lieutenant

<sup>48</sup> A less successful attempt, apparently by the Middlesex, had also been observed.

<sup>49</sup> The first company of the 60th, moving in single file with three yards between men, had got through with 21 casualties. The second, under Capt. R. J. Dickinson, advancing in successive "worm" groups when the shelling was terrific, had Lieut. N. E. Candy and 9 men hit *en route*; in the next two hours, waiting near Freeman's headquarters, it lost Lieut. J. W. Stubbs, wounded, and 53 men. The carrying company lost Lieuts. W. S. Kelly and D. G. S. Lindsay, and was broken up. Late in the afternoon it was partly reorganised by Lieut. S. Diamond. The 57th also, moving up later, suffered severely. Captains H. S. Dickinson, J. T. H. Aram, and G. V. W. Joynt were killed. Lieut. A. H. Miller had been killed while in charge of a carrying party. (Dickinson belonged to Warrnambool, Vic.; Candy, who died on 23 May, 1927, to Hampton, Vic.; Stubbs to Boree Creek, N.S.W.; Kelly to Elsternwick and Geelong, Vic.; Lindsay to Adelaide and Sydney; Diamond to Melbourne; Dickinson to Malvern Vic.; Aram to St. Kilda, Vic.; Joynt to Croydon, Vic.; Miller to Berwick and Beechworth, Vic.)

Beaver,<sup>50</sup> leading the troops straight to the right flank, was mortally hit as he reached it. By 6.30 Boyd, Freeman, and the much tried 58th had been relieved. At 7.5, on Marshall's report, Elliott sent up Stewart and the 57th.

Except for the 59th, Elliott had now thrown in the whole force intended for tomorrow's attack. His three other battalions had suffered loss—the 58th and 60th heavy loss—in the incessant barrage. The brigade, like the 4th King's (Liverpool Regiment) south of the gap, still held its complete front, but, apparently, with precarious tenure. On its right the Germans were level with its support line, well behind the alignment on which the attacking troops must assemble; not only had the enemy not been cleared, but the 33rd Division was uncertain where its own troops lay. The tapes to mark the starting-lines for tomorrow's attack were almost due to be laid, but officers of the 58th, who were to guide the assembling battalions, had been killed or wounded. The divisional dump and two forward dumps, from which the attacking troops were to have drawn their stores and ammunition, had been blown up.<sup>51</sup> Lastly, it was almost certain—as indeed happened—that the Germans must have learned of the intended attack.

At 7 o'clock Elliott telephoned to General Hobbs his strong views as to the seriousness of the situation. Hobbs informed corps headquarters, which at once asked for stronger efforts by the counter-batteries and the 33rd Division. At the same time he warned Brigadier-General Tivey that his brigade, the 8th, then in reserve, might have either to carry out to-morrow's attack or to lend two battalions for it. Hobbs knew that, upon a query from the X Corps, General Plumer had decided that the attack must go forward, although he had allowed the 33rd Division to modify its objective. About 8 o'clock Elliott telephoned that the possibility of an attack by his brigade was out of the question, and that the assembly of any troops under present conditions would be exceedingly difficult. Hobbs recognised the difficulty, and promised to inform corps headquarters, but he insisted that

<sup>50</sup> Lieut W. N. Beaver, 60th Bn. Resident magistrate, of Papua; b. St. Kilda, Vic., 11 May, 1882. Died of wounds, 26 Sept., 1917.

<sup>51</sup> One dump, however, was safe—at Clapham Junction, in the old German tunnel under the Menin road.

the attack must be made. His decision was at once confirmed by General Birdwood. The difficulties would be countered by special measures. The 8th Brigade would lend two battalions to take the second objective, the 15th Brigade still controlling the operation<sup>52</sup> and, with its one intact battalion, taking the first objective. The counter-batteries were endeavouring to subdue the German artillery; and the 33rd Division was putting in two fresh battalions to restore its line before zero hour. If it failed, any gap on the right in tomorrow's attack must be filled by striking from the flank.

These orders, reaching Elliott at 8.17 p.m., set him upon an entirely new task. He directed Colonel Stewart (57th), now going forward, to relieve Marshall (60th) of all responsibility for the defence of the line, and Marshall to concentrate upon laying the tapes and assembling the attack-battalions. So difficult was it to be sure of landmarks on the shattered ridge that Elliott had already decided to leave to Marshall the responsibility of selecting on the spot some datum point for determining the site of the lines to be taped. Marshall moved his headquarters up to Black Watch Corner, and allotted to the intelligence officer and scouts of each battalion the responsibility for laying the tapes from which their battalions would have started under the original arrangements; his own intelligence officer, Lieutenant Stillman<sup>53</sup> (60th), laid the foremost, and Lieutenants Doutreband<sup>54</sup> (57th) and Francis<sup>55</sup> (59th) the rearmost. Lieutenant Hooper (58th) re-marked the track from the rear and sent guides for the incoming battalions.

Meanwhile the attack-battalions were being brought up, and hurriedly informed of the plans. By the 59th the change of plan was easily mastered—it merely assaulted the first objective instead of the second. "You know what to do," said Elliott to Mason.<sup>56</sup> "Go and do it." For the 29th and 31st, the task was far more difficult. Brigadier-General Tivey and his brigade-major, Major Casey, were aware of the

<sup>52</sup> Hobbs so decided at Tivey's own request.

<sup>53</sup> Lieut.-Col. L. R. Stillman, M.C.; 60th Bn.; and commands 2nd/11th Fld. Regt., Arty., A.I.F., 1940. Barrister and solicitor, of Hawthorn, Vic., b. Hawthorn, 10 May, 1893.

<sup>54</sup> Lieut. R. Doutreband, M.C.; 57th Bn. Accountant; of Middle Park, Vic., and Sydney; b. Dubbo, N.S.W., 16 Sept., 1894.

<sup>55</sup> Lieut. J. W. Francis, 59th Bn. Farmer; of Hamilton, Vic.; b. Croxton West, Vic., 13 April, 1892. Killed in action, 26 Sept., 1917.

<sup>56</sup> At Hooge. The battalion was then at Clapham Junction, but a member of Elliott's staff, Capt. A. H. L. Godfrey (Geelong, Vic.), told the company commanders there what was intended, and Mason, returning, found them in the Menin road tunnel with their subalterns and N.C.O.'s issuing instructions as to the attack.

general course of that day's fighting, and Tivey especially warned Colonel Toll of the 31st to keep back his right flank if the British there were unable to advance. Toll, before leaving camp near Dickebusch, impressed this upon his company commanders. At 8 o'clock, on urgent orders from Hobbs, the 29th (Victoria) Battalion marched, the 31st (Queensland and Victoria) following soon after. By a wise provision, all battalions in the 5th Division had received copies of the divisional operation order,<sup>57</sup> and both commanders also called at Elliott's headquarters for final orders. To make up for the blowing up of the dumps, the pack train from Dickebusch undertook special efforts, and all infantry going forward picked up extra burdens.<sup>58</sup>

As if purposely to assist this preparation, the German artillery at 8.15 became almost silent. The supposed crisis at 6 and the subsequent cannonade had been due only to the apprehensions of both sides after a day of terrific strain. The night was perfect, light, with low clouds. A covering party of the 58th under Captain Gilchrist<sup>59</sup> lay out in Polygon Wood. The front line was held by two companies of the 60th, with two of the 57th helping to entrench. A third company of the 57th and the party of Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders held the right flank. A company of the 60th was in support, another in reserve. A small part of the 57th and 58th were carrying. The rest of the 58th, and some men of the 57th and 60th, were scattered, unorganised, and without instructions. Some lay in shell-holes, others wandered back to Clapham Junction and Hooge—a few even to Chateau Segard. Most of these were genuinely in search of orders, and anxious to do what was told them. It was remarked, however, that, after disorganisation by the heavy bombardment, men of

<sup>57</sup> General Hobbs and Colonel Peck (now G.S.O. 1 of the 5th Divn.) had foreseen that the operation order might be rather late. At the last moment a difference arose between Elliott and Hobbs in consequence of this order prescribing a one-company front for each battalion in the second phase of the attack, whereas Elliott had trained his battalions to attack on a three-company front. Hobbs said that the plan had been shown to General White and could not be altered now. Elliott afterwards protested against the supposed interference by Corps in a matter of detail, but the disposition was not prescribed by Corps but by Division.

<sup>58</sup> The diary of the 5th D.A.C. says that, while great efforts were made by all units, the 3rd D.A.C. outshone others. So keen were its officers to get the ammunition forward that, instead of using half their mules for riding, they used all for carrying, and marched 16 miles every night with 40 mules carrying full loads.

<sup>59</sup> Capt R. B. Gilchrist, 58th Bn. Linotype operator; of Auburn, Vic.; b. Albert Park, Vic., 11 Nov., 1885.

fatigue parties tended to lie in shell-holes waiting for direction, rather than to push on with their duty.

Guides from the 58th met the new battalions at Hooge. Sentries of the same battalion studded the track to Black Watch Corner. There the tape-laying parties took up the guidance and each led its allotted battalion on to the tapes.<sup>60</sup> The 29th, by mistake, preceded the 59th, and was already in position when the 59th arrived. The 59th lay down on a two-company front, and the 31st and 29th behind it each on a front of one company. German flares were constantly rising, but the stumps of Polygon Wood screened the moving troops. The 31st was delayed through some difficulty in finding the way; but it escaped a barrage which the Germans put down at 4.15 about Glencorse Wood.<sup>61</sup> Its last man was in position ten minutes before zero hour.

On the tapes the commander of the 29th, Lieutenant-Colonel Purser, had some chance of explaining to his officers Elliott's final directions, but for the 31st there was no chance of this. Moreover, through the haste, the instructions from Elliott were incomplete: though he had carefully trained his own battalions to keep their proper distances behind the barrage, he forgot to warn the 29th and 31st of this. In addition, although he had charged the 57th with continuing to follow up and guard the flank during the advance, a copy of this order was not sent to Colonels Toll and Purser.<sup>62</sup>

That the 33rd Division would be able to take its part was becoming more and more unlikely. Nothing had been heard of its two battalions that were to recapture during the night the lost front. Even its retrenched front had not been accurately located.<sup>63</sup> At 4.10 a.m. Elliott received from the 98th Brigade a message concerning the two battalions:

At the present time (4 a.m.) our left attacking battalion has three companies who have lost their way and are believed to be near Inverness

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<sup>60</sup> Colonel Mason tells with what confidence he saw the quiet, determined figures of his men filing past the dump and picking up their loads, one of the company commanders, Lieut. J. E. Turnour, standing by as supervisor.

<sup>61</sup> The tape-laying party of the 57th, returning with its duty finished, was terribly caught by this. Of 9 men with Lieut. Doutreband, 3 were killed and 5 wounded.

<sup>62</sup> Elliott had, however, mentioned it to them.

<sup>63</sup> Colonel Stewart, and his intelligence officer, on their way forward had visited the Argyll and Sutherland headquarters, and personally tried to find its front line, but could discover nothing in front of Verbeek Farm. The 33rd Division informed the 5th Australian several times that there was certainly a line 200 yards ahead (about Lone House), but it was not actually located until the two companies of Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders were found there next day, after the attack began.



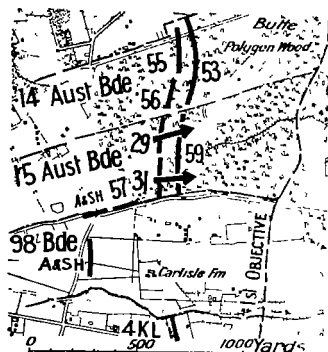
Copse making their way forward. The left battalion hopes to have at least one company forward which will try to get as close to the original front line as possible by zero.

This could only mean that support for the Australian right was almost out of the question. But the information did not reach the assembling troops.

The barrage, which descended at 5.50 on September 26th, just as the Polygon plateau became visible, was the most perfect that ever protected Australian troops. **Sept. 26—The right flank** It seemed to break out, as almost every report emphasises, with a single crash. The ground was dry, and the shell-bursts raised a wall of dust and smoke which appeared almost to be solid. So dense was the cloud that individual bursts, except the white puffs of shrapnel above its near edge, could not be distinguished. Roaring, deafening, it rolled ahead of the troops "like a Gippsland bushfire." Its very density carried one disadvantage; in such a fog, it was difficult to discern where the actual line of shell-bursts lay, except by running into them. Direction had to be kept by officers with compass in hand.

Both the I Anzac divisions and five British ones moved forward under this barrage. But it will be convenient to follow, in the first place, the operation of the 15th Australian Brigade and the 33rd British Division, which had been so jeopardised by the events of the previous day, and on which directly depended the success of the whole offensive. When the barrage fell, the 59th, whose tape was close to it, waited for three minutes and then began to follow, as it had been trained by Elliott to do, with a thin screen in front and the successive waves taking up proper distances in rear. The two 8th Brigade battalions behind it, however, had been taught, whatever happened, to close quickly with the barrage and then follow it tenaciously. The result was that, from the start, the 59th found the 31st and 29th hurrying through it. Part of the 29th was actually sent back again, but, when the general advance began, this pressure could not be resisted. The 31st and 29th went through; the order of the 59th was broken; part held back, as ordered, part went on with the rest as one thick line in the edge of the barrage. The area

traversed, previously empty, had since yesterday been thickly held by Germans, especially machine-gunners, protecting the flank of the 229th R.I.R. Lieutenant Gullett,<sup>64</sup> intelligence officer of the 29th, who went with his battalion, noted "about 18 (German) machine-guns" firing here or there through the barrage. As the troops sighted one or another close ahead through the fog, the line might for a moment ripple, but then swing suddenly towards the gun from all sides. Usually the Germans threw up their hands in the vain hope of mercy, but Gullett saw one German who kept his thumbs on the button until a bayonet drove into his chest. Some of the enemy showed fight at two pillboxes in the south-west corner of the "wood," and at another on the so-called "racecourse,"<sup>65</sup> and machine-guns fired from the Butte, outside the brigade's area. Captains Stockfeld<sup>66</sup> (59th) and Houlihan<sup>67</sup> (29th), and Lieutenants Turnour<sup>68</sup> and McIntosh<sup>69</sup> (59th) were mortally hit, and many Australians killed or wounded before the first objective was reached.<sup>70</sup>



On the left, although part of the attack went on with the 14th Brigade to its correct objective, a considerable portion of the 59th mistook for its goal part of the "racecourse," which was recognisable by the remains of a trench tramway and lay 150 yards short of the first objective. On the right the advance was still more confused. Although the leading

<sup>64</sup> Capt S. W. Gullett, O.B.E.; 29th Bn. Engineering works manager; of Melbourne; b. Lancefield, Vic, 7 Nov, 1889.

<sup>65</sup> Apparently the driving-track of a former Belgian artillery school.

<sup>66</sup> Capt. G. R. Stockfeld, 59th Bn. Bank clerk; of Surrey Hills, Vic; b. Hawthorn, Vic, 1895. Died of wounds, 26 Sept., 1917.

<sup>67</sup> Capt. J. V. Houlihan, 29th Bn. Railway draughtsman; of Melbourne; b. Warburton, Vic., 16 Nov, 1889. Killed in action, 26 Sept, 1917.

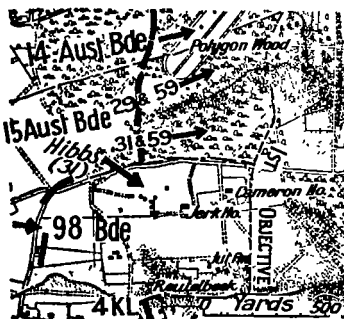
<sup>68</sup> Lieut. J. E. Turnour, 59th Bn. Theological student; of Bacchus Marsh and Cohuna, Vic.; b. Black Rock, Vic., 13 July, 1893. Died of wounds, 28 Sept., 1917.

<sup>69</sup> Lieut F. R. McIntosh, 59th Bn. Clerk; of Narracoorte, S Aust; b. Carlton, Vic, 23 July, 1893. Died of wounds, 28 Sept., 1917.

<sup>70</sup> It is said that Lieut Turnour's section of the line was held up by a machine-gun firing from a loop-holed pillbox, and that eventually, in order to avoid being delayed, he ordered parties to attack each flank while he himself went straight at the gun from the front. He was mortally wounded, but the place was captured.

platoons of the 31st, under Lieutenant Thompson,<sup>71</sup> moved straight on towards their objective, they almost immediately received fire from their right flank and rear. The rest of the first company, under Captain Hibbs,<sup>72</sup> swung a quarter right, straight at this fire, which came from the direction of the knoll and the group of pillboxes just down the slope on the 33rd Division's front.<sup>73</sup> These

blockhouses lay too close to catch the barrage, and a series of stubborn fights occurred at one after another of them.<sup>74</sup> Hibbs's company was eventually driven to ground in shell-holes 100 yards from Jerk House. Lieutenant Brodie,<sup>75</sup> waving a stick and shouting, "We must charge it," was shot through the head. Lieutenant Rose<sup>76</sup> was killed in the same way when almost level with Jerk House. Hibbs was shot by a sniper. His thin line extended 200 yards into the 33rd Division's territory, but Lieutenant Hill,<sup>77</sup> following with a few trench-mortar men, reinforced it.<sup>78</sup>



Although most of the rear companies took their proper course, the sound of firing brought some other officers and men in this direction.<sup>79</sup> All observed with deep apprehension that the flank was entirely unsupported. Hibbs's line lay

<sup>71</sup> Capt. R. Thompson, M.C.; 31st Bn. Carriage builder; of Ipswich, Q'land; b. Ipswich, 20 Aug., 1894.

<sup>72</sup> Capt. R. K. Hibbs, 31st Bn. Mercantile clerk; of Caulfield, Vic.; b. Moseley, Worcs, Eng, 20 Aug., 1892. Killed in action, 26 Sept., 1917.

<sup>73</sup> These pillboxes were on a slight spur, and whether Hibbs deliberately made for them, or followed the spur by mistake, will probably never be known.

<sup>74</sup> Private P. J. Bugden (Alstonville, N.S.W.) was the leader in several of these. A born athlete, he also rescued a comrade who had been captured by some Germans, and killed the Germans. He was killed later, but was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross. Sergeant S. G. Facey of the 59th, also, working almost by himself, secured a number of prisoners here.

<sup>75</sup> Lieut. J. G. Brodie, 31st Bn. Pastoralist; of Winton, Q'land; b. Bedourie, Q'land, 23 Sept., 1893. Killed in action, 26 Sept., 1917.

<sup>76</sup> Lieut. E. C. Rose, 31st Bn. Warehouse manager; of West End, South Brisbane; b. West End, 20 April, 1886. Killed in action, 26 Sept., 1917.

<sup>77</sup> Lieut. N. J. Hill, 8th L.T.M. Bty. Clerk; of Blackheath, N.S.W.; b. Summer Hill, N.S.W., 10 Feb., 1891.

<sup>78</sup> He had only smoke-shells for his mortars, a result of the blowing up of the dumps.

<sup>79</sup> Among them, Lieut. W. H. Scattergood (Brighton, Vic), 59th Bn., whose duty was to find the British on the right, Lieut. A. J. Pinkerton (Kongwak, Vic., died 10 Dec., 1938), signalling officer of the 59th, a sergeant and some men of the same battalion, and Lieut. C. C. Coutts (Ballarat, Vic), belonging to the last company of the 31st.

somewhat down the slope, subject to heavy machine-gun fire from Jerk House, where numerous German machine-guns were most vigorously handled. Germans were assembling at the post there, and Lieutenant Hill, while keeping watch on them, had his eye shot out. He still tried to direct, but most of his men were hit. The enemy made a swift counter-thrust and captured him with an officer of the 29th and about 20 men, 14 of them wounded.

This bold stroke was organised by Major Hethey, commanding this sub-sector, who had made Jerk House his headquarters. The 50th Reserve Division had reorganised its line during the night. The 229th R.I.R., whose attack had succeeded, had resumed command north of the Reutelbeek. The companies had been much mixed, all their commanders in the III Battalion, and two in the I Battalion, having been hit. The regiment divided its sector, Captain Fischer (in charge of the I/229th) with the 4th, 3rd, 5th, and 6th companies and storm troops taking the right (Polygon Wood), and Major Hethey with the III Battalion and a company of the II and half of the II/230th taking the left (Reutelbeek valley). The supports, 1st, 7th, and 8th companies of the 229th, were in Cameron Covert. The III/90th Fusilier Regt., the foremost troops of a fresh counter-attack division, the 17th, lay in the Flandern I Line.

As soon as the Australians attacked, the headquarters of these two commanders became points of stubborn resistance. Hethey's counter-attack from Jerk House was made with half the II Battalion, and the Germans claim 30 prisoners. But the fight was as costly in German as in Australian officers. Major Hethey was shot through the head directing the defence. Lieutenant Glaubitz, who succeeded him, and Lieutenant Weigel were shot in the same way about 7 o'clock, and Lieutenant Stölting (of the machine-gun company) through the heart at 7.30. The adjutant, Lieutenant Körber, held on.

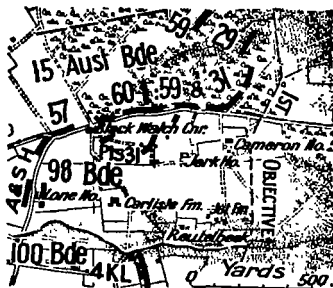
Meanwhile the main body of the 31st reaching the first objective had been viciously fired on from Cameron House, now close on its right. Major Tracy,<sup>80</sup> acting in precise accordance with the orders actually given to him, though not in conformity with General Elliott's intention, vigorously swung back the flank and organised a line facing south along the edge of the valley. With an aggressive enemy there, he had no alternative. But his orders—necessarily communicated, in that uproar, by signs—caused an unintended retirement of a neighbouring part of the line. Colonel Mason (59th) saw these men walking quietly back, and easily set right the mistake.

Several messages, saying that the flank was open, quickly reached the common headquarters of the three attacking

<sup>80</sup> Lieut.-Col W. W. Tracy, 31st Bn. Member of Aust Permanent Forces; of East Malvern, Vic., b. Beechworth, Vic., 27 Jan., 1877.

battalions at Black Watch Corner.<sup>81</sup> The company of the 57th which was to have safeguarded the flank,<sup>82</sup> had met the full German barrage, which fell behind the attacking troops a few minutes after zero, and could not get through. The 60th, in the old front line, was about to be relieved, but as it was ahead of the German barrage Colonel Marshall at once undertook to safeguard the flank. But Colonel Toll (31st) had already had to face the decision whether at 7.30, the time for the second stage of the advance, he should let his battalion attack with its flank open. He decided that the risk was too great, and therefore ordered his troops to remain on and behind the first objective until the British came up.

By a more questionable decision this order was applied to the 29th also; the holding back of that battalion would leave open the flank of the 14th Brigade further north. The order reached the companies of the 29th just as they were about to start, and, apparently with one exception, their officers held them back. It is said that Lieutenant Harper<sup>83</sup> refused to stay, and took his men forward on the flank of the 14th Brigade. The order did not reach Toll's own companies (31st) in time, and they advanced with the barrage. Seeing, however, that the 29th did not move, Lieutenant Walter<sup>84</sup> was going across to it when he met the runner with the order to Major Tracy. Tracy was then wounded, but on the message reaching Captain McLennan,<sup>85</sup> his successor, the men, then 150 yards out, were brought back to the first objective, near Cameron House. Lieutenant Blomfield<sup>86</sup> and part of the rear company



<sup>81</sup> The first was from Lieut. Thompson, timed 6.5. The next from the same officer, near Cameron House, at 6.25. The next from Lieuts. Pinkerton (59th) and Coutts (31st) overlooking Jerk House, at 6.26.

<sup>82</sup> It had been guarding the flank near Black Watch Corner.

<sup>83</sup> Lieut. G. Harper, M.C.; 29th Bn. Bookbinder; of Melbourne and Sydney; b. Springburn, Glasgow, Scotland, 10 Sept., 1893.

<sup>84</sup> Capt. B. H. Walter, 31st Bn. Commercial traveller; of Mosman, N.S.W.; b. North Sydney, 1 May, 1895.

<sup>85</sup> Capt. H. E. McLennan, M.C., 31st Bn. Grazier; of Burnett district, Q'land. b. Brisbane, 18 Aug., 1887. Died 1926.

<sup>86</sup> Capt. C. J. Blomfield, M.C.; 31st Bn. Law clerk; of Auckland, N.Z.; b. Whangaroa, N.Z., 28 May, 1893.

were sent back along the flank and, later supported by part of the 60th, formed several tiers of fire looking out towards Jerk House. But the leading platoons of the 31st under Lieutenant R. Thompson did not receive the order. As before, they went on with the barrage.

Toll's message to Elliott, informing him of the decision to hold up the attack, brought from that vigorous commander a characteristic order to go on or be superseded. Toll endeavoured to carry out Elliott's wish, but, his troops being scattered and inextricably intermingled with the 59th, swift compliance was impossible. It was typical of Elliott that thenceforward he dealt chiefly direct with Norman Marshall, thus placing Toll, whom he had not actually superseded, in a difficult position.<sup>87</sup>

At this stage a message from the 33rd Division gave an opportunity for making reasonable arrangements for the further advance of the 29th and 31st. The two attack-battalions of the 98th Brigade—4th Suffolk and 1/5th Scottish Rifles—though split by heavy barrage and not completely assembled, had, just before zero, attempted to come up to the Australian flank, but had only reached the Lone House line, in which they found the two companies of Highlanders. Accordingly, at 8 a.m., the 33rd Division gave the 98th Brigade a fresh battalion, the 2nd Royal Welch Fusilier, which was to be brought round through the Australian back area to attack the first objective from Elliott's right flank. The 31st and 29th were now ordered to advance at the same time to the *second* objective. The order was issued about 11. The advance was to be made at noon under a special barrage, and, so far as the 29th was concerned, this was what its commander afterwards supposed and reported to have happened, and his story has gone into history. No discredit whatever is due to him for that; his report was based on the best information then obtainable. But, actually, the midday barrage was never fired, the midday attack did not take place. Two hours before Colonel Purser's order was issued, his line already lay on the second objective.

What had happened was as follows. Half-an-hour after the attack on the first objective, but before the attack on the

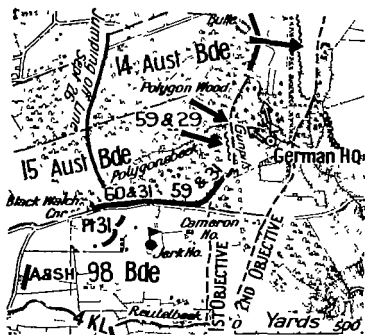
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<sup>87</sup> Elliott, however, did not know how intermixed the troops were.

second, an officer of the 59th, Captain Neale,<sup>88</sup> previously detached on special duty, found his battalion digging along the Polygon "racecourse." Nearly all the officers had been hit, but Neale recognised that the 59th was digging in too far back. About 200 yards ahead, beyond a depression in the plateau, was a slight crest which he rightly took to be the true first objective; some of the 8th Brigade were digging there, but others were walking back to the 59th. Neale at once decided to take the 59th forward, and, sending Lieutenant Pentreath<sup>89</sup> to the left, he himself led out the right.

The depression ahead was the bed of a small marshy stream, the Polygonebeek, which ran through the objective. Fortunately the soil of the plateau was sandy and the going easy. Germans at an old battery position on the objective opened fire, but, as the line approached, fell back on a group of pillboxes where the Polygonebeek ran through the second objective.

This advance must have occurred about the time of the second phase, in which the 14th Brigade and the left of the 8th moved to the second objective. Immediately after that phase there emerged from the pillboxes beside the Polygonebeek, which should have been attacked by the 29th in the second phase, a number of Germans advancing against the right flank and rear of the 14th Brigade. Led by a battalion commander, the left of this counter-attack approached the posts of Lieutenants McDonald<sup>90</sup> (59th) and Wilson<sup>91</sup> (31st) on the first objective. After disabling one of McDonald's Lewis guns, the Germans



<sup>88</sup> Capt. S. W. Neale, M.C.; 59th Bn. Law student; of East Kew, Vic.; b. Melbourne, 1894. Died of wounds, 29 Sept., 1918.

<sup>89</sup> Lieut. G. L. Pentreath, M.C.; 59th Bn. Schoolmaster; of Mitiamo, Vic.; b. Mitiamo, 18 July, 1893.

<sup>90</sup> Lieut. S. R. McDonald, 59th Bn. Wheat farmer and grazier; of Fernhurst, Vic.; b. Steiglitz, Vic., 16 Feb., 1892.

<sup>91</sup> Capt. G. H. Wilson, M.C.; 31st Bn. School teacher; of South Brisbane and Wynnum, Q'land; b. Wellington Point, Q'land, 27 Dec., 1886. Died 28 Dec., 1937.

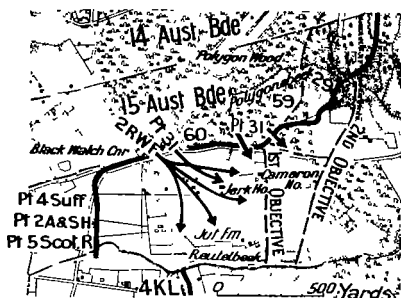
pushed almost to McDonald's post, but at this stage their leader was wounded. They turned and fell back on the pillboxes, from which they continued to fire.

It was at this juncture that Captain Neale's line reached the first objective. To stop the fire from these pillboxes, Lieutenant Pentreath and his party pushed straight on, and, working round by the south, easily captured them.<sup>92</sup> The German leader with his staff and about 60 men were made prisoners.

This leader was Captain Fischer, in charge of the right sector of the 229th R.I.R. At 6.20 he had informed his regimental commander that the hostile advance threatened to outflank him. At 8 o'clock he reported that he was counter-attacking north and west and holding on. Thereafter his messages ceased.

This spontaneous advance brought the troops practically on to the 29th's second objective. Captain Cate<sup>93</sup> of that battalion, who now took command of the post, found himself by 9.45 in touch with Lieutenant R. Thompson and the leading fragment of the 31st. When the great barrage ended, at 11.17, the position was well consolidated. It was an excellent one, commanding the Polygonebeek valley, and the men were full of confidence.<sup>94</sup> The contact airman (4th Squadron, R.F.C.) marked their flares on his map, and dropped it at 11.25 at 5th Divisional Headquarters.<sup>95</sup>

Shortly before noon the 2nd Royal Welch Fusiliers reached Black Watch Corner after a wide détour through the 4th Divisional sector. At 10.30 their commander



<sup>92</sup> Corporal W. S. Crozier (Numurkah, Vic.), 59th Bn., dropped into a shell-hole and trained his Lewis gun on the position while Pentreath and some men moved to the entrance of the main pillbox and bombed it. Lieut. W. T. Hogg (Surrey Hills, Vic.), 31st Bn., was mortally wounded here.

<sup>93</sup> Major H. C. E. Cate, 29th Bn. Clerk; of Kew, Vic.; b. Glenelg, S. Aust., 20 Feb., 1886.

<sup>94</sup> Lieut. Gullett, sent by Purser to observe the supposed advance at noon, found the line of small posts established in shell-holes, in the bottom of which each group seemed to have lighted a few sticks to make tea. Each "digger" was a general so far as concerned the position that could be seen from his own shell-hole. "They'll never get through here, Mr. Gullett," they said. Thompson received Toll's order to come back to the first objective, but, after finding the position of other parts of the battalion, and reporting his own, stayed on.

<sup>95</sup> Probably this news—unknown to Colonel Purser—prevented the firing of the barrage, which would have fallen on these troops.



had joined his three Australian colleagues there. Colonel Purser and his assistant adjutant<sup>96</sup> explained to him the position, and the battalion attacked soon after.<sup>97</sup> Its commander<sup>98</sup> was killed at once, by a shell. The scattered elements of the 31st advanced at the same time, Captain McLennan on the British left,<sup>99</sup> and Lieutenants Coutts<sup>100</sup> and Gamble<sup>101</sup> (31st) with the troops near Jerk House following the British as a second wave. The attack was practically unprotected by barrage<sup>102</sup> and met with furious machine-gun fire.

The Germans, probably seeing this attack forming up, had (according to their own accounts) retired from Jerk House at noon. But the German machine-guns farther south had the attack in full view. The history of the 230th R.I.R. says: "When, about 11 a.m., the wall of must on the right flank of the regiment had disappeared, the men of the 230th (on the Polderhoek spur) saw the deploying enemy, behind his rolling barrage, advancing deep on its flank and manifestly in the act of pushing to the south-east. Enemy columns, following after, were trying to reach Polygon Wood. On this incredibly favourable target there now fell at 1,000-1,800 metres the fire of all the heavy machine-guns of the regiment that were still available, with annihilating effect, the British artillery being unable fully to suppress them. Seven heavy machine-guns of the 1st company sent streaming out in a short time more than 20,000 rounds."

In the supporting wave, first Coutts and then Gamble were killed.<sup>103</sup> The Welch reached Jerk House but not Cameron House. McLennan stopped his advance several hundred yards out, and found touch with them. The 59th and 60th remained in the old positions.

The Welch had not gained the first objective, though they were reported to have done so. Efforts by the 31st to surround Cameron House failed. At 1.40 McLennan warned

<sup>96</sup> Lieut. (later Capt.) C. E. Davis, D.S.O., M.C.; 29th Bn. Law student; of Toorak, Vic.; b. Malvern, Vic., 25 Sept., 1891.

<sup>97</sup> This was the first clearing by the 98th Brigade of its old front line.

<sup>98</sup> Major R. A. Poore, D.S.O.; 2nd Bn., Royal Welch Fusiliers. Solicitor; of Salisbury, Wilts., Eng.; b. Bath, Eng., 8 July, 1870. Killed in action, 26 Sept., 1917.

<sup>99</sup> The order only reached Capt. McLennan at 12.10 p.m., but his line was far in advance of the British starting point, and he went forward at 12.15. Toll, in accordance with Elliott's peremptory orders, directed McLennan to use the whole 31st Battalion, and leave no one in rear of the first objective. Orderly reorganisation, though enjoined upon McLennan, was out of the question.

<sup>100</sup> Lieut. C. C. Coutts, 31st Bn. Collar maker; of Ballarat, Vic.; b. Ballarat, 27 June, 1894. Killed in action, 26 Sept., 1917.

<sup>101</sup> Lieut. J. S. Gamble, 31st Bn. Currier; of Preston, Vic.; b. Carlton, Vic., 1890. Killed in action, 26 Sept., 1917.

<sup>102</sup> Owing to a mistaken belief that the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders were out in front, the 98th Brigade commander caused the artillery to fire beyond the second objective.

<sup>103</sup> The loss of officers in the 31st in this offensive was particularly severe. In addition to the five already mentioned, Lieuts. C. H. Chute and R. C. Nancarrow were killed this day, and Lieuts. J. Danaher and T. A. Blackley on the 27th. (Chute belonged to Bondi, N.S.W., and Longreach, Q'land; Nancarrow to Orange, N.S.W.; Danaher to Brisbane; Blackley to Atherton, Q'land.)

Colonel Toll that ammunition was running low; and, despite efforts to make up for the destruction of the dumps,<sup>104</sup> this condition was becoming general. About 4 o'clock line after line of Germans was seen coming over the shoulder of Reutel hill, 1,000 yards away.<sup>105</sup> Others were moving up the Reutel-beek valley, below Polderhoek. Ammunition, though promised, had not arrived, and, as very little remained, the commander of the Welch on McLennan's right informed him that he was about to fall back. McLennan agreed that the Welch should withdraw to the spur at Jerk House, and that his own troops, after covering them, should retire to the first objective.

In carrying this out the Welch, instead of stopping at Jerk House, fell back on—and at some points through—the 59th and 60th. These were expecting attack, the corps having been electrified by the statements of a prisoner that the 4th German Guard Division would counter-attack the flank south of Polygon Wood. Airmen reported the roads north of Reutel full of advancing Germans. Corps headquarters ordered barrages, including gas-shell, to be laid on Holle Bosch and other routes of approach. When the supporting troops, eagerly watching this enemy over half-a-mile away, found the Welch withdrawing under no apparent pressure, several of them ran out<sup>106</sup> and vehemently rallied them. The Germans were still advancing, and several of their airmen, flying low, attacked with machine-guns the line of Captain Neale and Lieutenant Bursey,<sup>107</sup> and of Captain McLennan, who was now on the first objective. The troops, neglecting the distant infantry in order to fire at the aeroplanes, almost immediately brought down the most aggressive, which crashed beside the trench. When attention reverted to the German infantry, the British barrage was scattering them, and, not without disappointment, the troops saw some driven to earth and others fleeing over the hilltop. These were rallied, and

<sup>104</sup> The 57th and part of the 58th were carrying, and, by men returning to the front line, Sergeant-Major J. S. Aikins (Ballarat and Flemington, Vic.) of the 59th sent forward 20,000 rounds in cotton bandoliers. Stokes ammunition in the line had been almost completely expended.

<sup>105</sup> Some earlier local movement against the 33rd's left had been stopped.

<sup>106</sup> Including Lieuts. A. J. Pinkerton and W. G. Sansom, and Pte. M. V. Brockfield, of the 59th. (Pinkerton belonged to Kongwak, Vic.; Sansom to Lake Boga, Vic.; Brockfield to Apollo Bay, Vic.)

<sup>107</sup> Capt. T. F. McL. Bursey, M.C.; 59th Bn. Letter carrier; of Korumburra, Vic., b. Albert Park, Vic., 29 Sept., 1894.

from 6.30 to 8.15 the artillery pounded the enemy on this front and that of the 33rd Division. No counter-attack came near.

The history of the 230th R.I.R. states that the right of the British near "Jut Farm" was first thrown back by a local counter-attack about 2 o'clock. The main effort, which the Australians now saw, was made, not by any guard division, but by the 17th, which had been hurried forward. It was to advance (with the 236th Division on its right) and capture the Wilhelm Line. Its 89th (Grenadier) Regiment, which was to attack through the 229th R.I.R., had run into heavy artillery-fire in the Holle Bosch, and, coming over Reutel hill, was shattered by the barrage. Parts did not even reach the Flanders I Line. The I and II/75th I.R., south of the Reutelbeek, came under heavy machine-gun fire and got no farther than the front line of the 230th R.I.R. Thus again a powerful counter-attack had with difficulty reached the position to which the line-divisions had been driven back.<sup>108</sup>

This was the position at dusk. The British brigadier now learnt that his troops were only slightly ahead of the original (Carlisle Farm) line. To clear up all doubts, he asked that during the night an Australian patrol should meet one from his brigade and reconnoitre his first objective. The patrols missed each other, but the Australian one, under Lieutenant Peacock,<sup>109</sup> 57th Battalion, reported that the 98th Brigade's line was at Jerk House, but that Cameron House, on its first objective, was held by Australians.

What had happened was that, at dusk, Brigadier-General Elliott, learning that the 33rd Division had been ordered to capture its *second* objective and that he was to assist it, charged Colonel Marshall with the sole task of co-operating in this attack. For this purpose two reserve companies of the 60th were moved up to the 31st. As the 33rd Division made no move, Elliott, fearing the night might be wasted, ordered Marshall to direct the Australian attack. Marshall first undertook the reorganisation of the troops in his neighbourhood.<sup>110</sup> Coming up while this was in progress, Marshall characteristically proposed to some of his young officers a raid on some blockhouses close in front. Leading the party himself with his trusted intelligence officer, Lieutenant Stillman, he

<sup>108</sup> See sketch on p. 330.

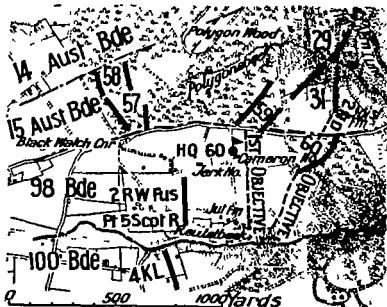
<sup>109</sup> Capt. B. Peacock, M.C.; 57th Bn. Draper; of Daylesford, Vic., and Albury, N.S.W.; b. Daylesford, 28 June, 1896.

<sup>110</sup> These included, besides the 60th, some of the 57th, 31st, and R. W. Fusiliers. The reorganisation was much assisted by the arrival of Lieuts. M. D. Knight and F. A. Dolphin (60th) from the nucleus camp at Caestre. Capt. R. J. Dickson and Lieut. J. H. Arter (60th) and Lieut. J. J. Thomson (57th) also took part. (Knight belonged to St. Kilda, Vic.; Dolphin to Sale, Vic.; Dickson to Warrnambool, Vic.; Arter to Carrajung, Vic.; Thomson to Collingwood, Vic.)

worked round and captured the place together with a few prisoners. He did not know that he had taken Cameron House.

At dawn General Elliott decided to ascertain personally how his flank lay, and, despite the entreaties of Colonel Peck, he went straight to the front, reaching it at 8 o'clock. He found it extraordinarily quiet. By then Marshall, with little opposition, had taken the 60th on to the next spur, on which lay the stumps of Cameron

Covert.<sup>111</sup> Here, from a position well ahead of the second objective, he looked down the Polygonebeek and Reutelbeek valleys. His position was wholly in the 33rd Division's sector. On his left the 31st Battalion presently moved up under vicious machine-gun fire. In the afternoon the



Royal Welch Fusiliers came down the Reutelbeek valley. Their advance, Marshall reported, "was superb." Notwithstanding the enemy barrage and machine-gun fire, they came forward, line after line, in splendid manner.

The whole objective on this difficult flank was thus seized. The shelling of Polygon Wood this day was terrific, but the scattered reserves largely escaped it. The troops under Elliott were relieved that night by the 30th and 32nd Battalions (8th Brigade), and on September 28th the 23rd Division, on relieving the 33rd, also took over Cameron Covert from the Australians.

This outstanding achievement overshadowed the work of the 14th Brigade and the 4th Division further north. The

#### **The Centre and Left**

story of that work nevertheless provides many points of great interest. In the 14th Brigade the 53rd Battalion, which was to take the first objective, occupied during the day before the

<sup>111</sup> He made this advance with small fighting patrols in front, and Lewis guns close behind to cover them. The main force followed. "The men of the 60th," says Lieut Gamble, who accompanied Marshall, "experienced for a few hours the fighting of their dreams." The few Germans met were demoralised, but, as the Covert was reached, machine-guns from the Flandern I Line and from the flanks opened. Lieut. A. Banner (Petersham, N.S.W.) was killed, and the advance



44. POLYGON WOOD AND THE BUTTE

Near The Butte Cemetery, 28th September, 1917. The men shown are stretcher-bearers of the 57th Battalion. Note the two white stakes marking the track

*Aust. War Memorial Official Photo No E1912*

*To face p 824*



45. ZONNEBEKE BRICK KILN AND CHURCH

The photograph looks northward, and was taken on 5th October, 1917, from near the "jumping-off" line of the previous day's attack.

*Aust War Memorial Official Photo No. E914.*

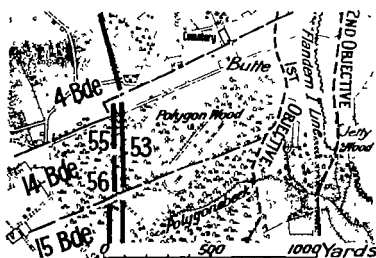
*To face p 825.*

advance the detested support position at Nonne Bosschen. There it caught in full the tremendous bombardments of September 25th, and by evening had lost 150 men.<sup>112</sup> Its ration party was gassed; many had to eat their emergency ration, and fill their waterbottles from shell-holes. Yet this hard-grained force was in keen spirit when at midnight it moved to its tapes.<sup>113</sup>

To keep his attacking troops clear of the barrage, Brigadier-General Hobkirk assembled the whole of their twelve waves within 60 yards depth. At 4 o'clock the precautionary German barrage fell harmlessly in rear.<sup>114</sup>

When their own barrage opened, the battalions pressed on so keenly<sup>115</sup> that they were hampered by the three minutes' wait.<sup>116</sup> The three battalions, 53rd in the first line and 56th and 55th behind it, knew the ground well.<sup>117</sup>

The graphic report of the 55th describes how Captain Cotterell<sup>118</sup> led its advance, walking easily, cigarette in mouth, map in hand, behind him the thick line of "worm columns" each led by an N.C.O. All pillboxes were



became more difficult. It was completed by dribbling the troops forward. Gamble's Stokes mortars fired on the German machine-guns, especially on the Polderhoek spur, and silenced them; but the German artillery in its turn found the trench-mortars, which had consequently to shelter at Cameron House.

<sup>112</sup> Lieut. W. C. Jennings (Rockdale, N.S.W.) was killed, as was Lieut. J. Bowran (Lithgow, N.S.W.) of the 54th (holding the front line). Bowran was a Wesleyan minister.

<sup>113</sup> The lines had been pegged on the 24th by some of the 14th Field Company under Major H. Bachtold and Lieut. H. W. Fry, and laid on the 25th by intelligence officers with the help of two engineers, Sgt. E. Murray and Cpl. J. H. Moore. (Bachtold belonged to Sydney; Fry to Turrumurra, N.S.W.; Murray to Duntroon, Fed. Cap. Territory; Moore, who died on 6 June, 1929, to Sydney.)

<sup>114</sup> Before the approach, however, while the headquarters of the 56th Battalion was waiting in Chateau Wood, ready to move, a single shell killed the medical officer, Captain G. S. Elliott (brother of Brig.-Gen. Elliott), mortally wounded Capt. A. C. Chappell, the adjutant, and put out of action the signalling officer, Lieut. E. Dawes, and most of his men. (Elliott belonged to Melbourne and Ballarat, Vic.; Chappell to Brisbane and Sydney; Dawes to Corrimall, N.S.W.)

<sup>115</sup> The assembly was covered by Capt. Morris of the 54th with two platoons of that battalion, which was not to attack. When the others passed through, however, these men could not be held back.

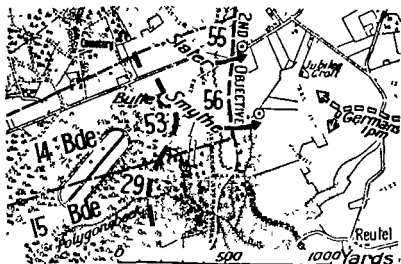
<sup>116</sup> The 55th caught a few shells of the German barrage which fell at 5.54.

<sup>117</sup> The report of the 55th says that they had watched the previous shelling of the pillboxes, knowing that these "would soon be ours, and . . . eager to chase the enemy from them."

<sup>118</sup> Capt. F. J. Cotterell, M.C.; 55th Bn. Builder's clerk; of Sydney and Cook's Hill, N.S.W.; b. Erdington, Birmingham, Eng., 12 June, 1889. Killed in action, 2 Sept., 1918.

immediately outflanked. From some came whimpering boys, holding out hands full of souvenirs. After an unhindered advance of 500 yards, the silhouette of the Butte showed up in the fog. A few figures of German machine-gunners were seen upon it, but they quickly ran off, and the 53rd swarmed over it and bombed the entrances of dugouts on the farther side. On the left, from the cemetery and pill-boxes beside it, once a regimental headquarters, machine-guns fired. The place was forthwith seized.<sup>119</sup> In the Butte dugouts 60 Germans, largely medical personnel, surrendered after firing a few shots up the stairs.

The 14th Brigade's second objective included 1,000 yards of the Flandern I Line, and a number of pillboxes. When the 56th and 55th launched this final stage of the advance at 7.30, they found the Flandern Line recognisable only by shreds of the entanglement, and the pillboxes were easily taken, but sharp fire came from the right. The source of this was the German headquarters on the Polygonebeek, which at the moment lay short of the barrage and unattacked by the 29th, which was not yet up. Company Sergeant-Majors Brewer<sup>120</sup> and Loney<sup>121</sup> (53rd) were killed trying to remedy this. Captain Plomley<sup>122</sup> (56th) sent Lieutenant Scott<sup>123</sup> to secure the flank, but the place was soon afterwards taken by the 29th.<sup>124</sup> The 56th and 55th passed the Flandern Line,<sup>125</sup> and were fired on by machine-guns from two pillboxes beyond. Captain Smythe (56th) with some of his men captured one of these



<sup>119</sup> In this fighting Lieut. W. L. Lamerton (Bathurst, N.S.W.) was prominent at the cemetery, and Lieut. H. S. Geldard (Armidale, N.S.W.) and Sergeant A. M. Allison (Forbes, N.S.W.) at the Butte.

<sup>120</sup> C.S.M. H. Brewer (No. 2330; 53rd Bn.). School teacher; of Haberfield, N.S.W.; b. Carr's Creek, N.S.W., 11 Feb., 1884. Killed in action, 26 Sept., 1917.

<sup>121</sup> C.S.M. F. J. M. Syer (served as 2610 F. W. Loney; 53rd Bn.). Labourer; of Fitzroy, Vic.; b. Geelong, Vic., 1893. Killed in action, 26 Sept., 1917.

<sup>122</sup> Capt. N. R. Plomley, M.C.; 56th Bn. Clerk; of Manly, N.S.W.; b. Woollahra, N.S.W., 7 April, 1892.

<sup>123</sup> Lieut. L. Scott, M.C.; 56th Bn. Sugar chemist; of Wahroonga, N.S.W.; b. Tumut, N.S.W., 31 July, 1892. (Brother of the commander of this battalion.)

<sup>124</sup> Lieut. D. A. Mehan (Townsville, Q'land, and Sydney) on this flank was temporarily held up by two pillboxes. L/Cpl. R. J. Hillier (Exeter, N.S.W.) worked behind one, and shot the German machine-gunner.

<sup>125</sup> Here known to the British as "Jetty" and "Juniper" Trenches.



together with 15 Germans, and Lieutenant Slater<sup>126</sup> with three of the 55th took the other and 30 prisoners. This for a time ended serious resistance, and Australian infantry, with characteristic nonchalance, roamed over the plateau. As, however, the two forward blockhouses lay in the Anzac barrage-line, they were not retained.<sup>127</sup>

The expected counter-attack was now confidently awaited. An artillery observer, and machine-gunners, quickly stationed themselves on top of the Butte from which the remaining undulations of the plateau were partly overlooked. At 1 o'clock Germans were sighted dribbling over the shoulder north of Becelaere. For three hours this movement continued, though pounded by the observed fire of two 6-inch howitzers and a few 18-pounders. At 5 o'clock these Germans, having assembled along a road, began to advance through gaps in the hedges. The machine-guns on the Butte and the 6-inch howitzers again caught them. Some broke back, many came on; but no actual counter-attack was made.

From German records, it appears that these troops were the 89th (Grenadier) Regiment (17th Division) attempting to assemble for counter-attack.

The 14th Brigade had easily seized the main objective, together with some 200 prisoners and 34 machine-guns. Its casualties were not heavy, but included one of the noblest British officers in the A.I.F., Lieutenant-Colonel Croshaw, who was mortally wounded by a German shell early in the attack, his adjutant being hit at the same time.<sup>128</sup>

The 14th Brigade had been opposed partly by the 50th Reserve Division, partly by the 3rd Reserve. The advance of the 4th Division, wholly opposed by the 3rd Reserve, was easier. The ground offered one disadvantage—it was overlooked by the main ridge at Broodseinde. On the other hand the German counter-attack division, unless it waited for night,

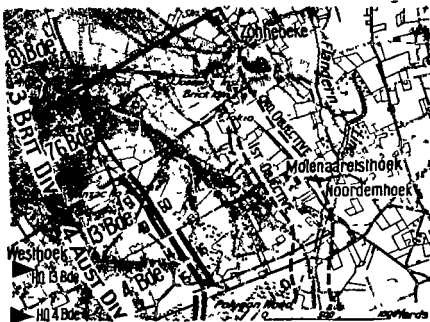
<sup>126</sup> Lieut. H. E. Slater, D.S.O.; 55th Bn. Farmer; of Wagga Wagga, N.S.W.; b. Drummoyne, N.S.W., 6 April, 1891.

<sup>127</sup> Captured German officers noted, and admired, this careless attitude under fire.

<sup>128</sup> Croshaw had a premonition of his end. Before the advance he said to his officers. "Gentlemen, your men before yourselves. Look to your flanks. God bless you lads, till we meet again." He moved in the centre of the battalion, but few saw him fall. His adjutant was hit at the same time. Croshaw had joined the A.I.F. in Egypt, and was devoted to his men. The chaplain of his unit (Father Kennedy) describes him as "the bravest soldier, the most God-fearing christian, and the most perfect gentleman I have ever known." Capt. P. T. Roberts took command of the 53rd during the action. Other officers who lost their lives were Lieut. A. O. Correy (53rd), Capt. R. V. Single and H. G. Thompson (56th), Lieut. A. de V. Kidson (56th), and Lieut. D. L. Maughan (14th M.G. Coy.). A famous leader of the 53rd, Capt. C. A. Johnson, was

would have to cross that ridge in plain view. The 4th Division assembled early—three Australian brigades and those of the V Corps had to pass through the Menin Gate. All the 4th Division's waves assembled forward<sup>129</sup> and escaped the German barrages.

The advance went as planned and almost without incident, except the smothering of pillboxes. At one stage, forgetting that the barrage was to remain stationary there for a double period,<sup>130</sup> part of the line ran into it and then broke back. Captain Jacka (14th) at once steadied the troops and led them on again. The second objective<sup>131</sup> here lay just short of the Flanders I position, and immediately after the final advance snipers became troublesome. Captain Wanliss (14th) was killed by a machine-gun which he was trying to locate.<sup>132</sup>



This advance brought the left battalion (51st) of the division to the brick-yard at Zonnebeke. On its left the 3rd British Division did not quite reach the railway station, and further north, delayed in the Zonnebeke mud, was held up short of the "vital"<sup>133</sup> Windmill Cabaret crest. Its line,

wounded early in the attack. (Croschaw belonged to Chislehurst, Kent, Eng.; Kennedy to Myrtleford, Vic.; Roberts to Bendigo, Vic.; Correy to Concord, N.S.W.; Single to Mudgee, N.S.W.; Thompson to Bathurst, N.S.W.; Kidson to Epping, N.S.W.; Maughan to Glen Innes, N.S.W.; Jhonson, who was mortally wounded on 30 Sept., 1918, to Parramatta, N.S.W.)

<sup>129</sup> The 13th Brigade lay out 150 yards in depth. As in the 2nd Division on Sept. 20, the battalions attacked with four companies in line, each on a one-platoon front.

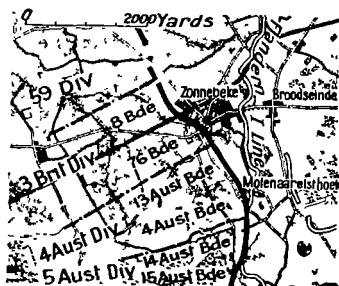
<sup>130</sup> In accordance with the arrangements for the 3rd British Division on the left  
<sup>131</sup> Of the advance to this, Colonel McSharry (15th) reported "It was a short, sharp fight, a regular Irish affair."

<sup>132</sup> This was a grievous loss. By his friends, including General Monash, Colonels Peck and Durrant, Chaplain Rolland, and men of all ranks, Harold Wanliss had been recognised as a young man possibly destined, if he lived, to lead Australia Peck, formerly his battalion commander, wrote "Many brave men, many good men I have met, but he was the king of them all." He added that he "cursed the day" that had deprived him of the chance of preserving Wanliss's life. Chaplain Rolland said: "Unless I was blind, he would have been Australia's leader in days when she will sorely need one." "Dux" of Ballarat College, he had studied agriculture at Hawkesbury College, and had taken up land just before the war. His periods of furlough he had devoted to study of industries new to Australia, which he would endeavour to introduce there after the war.

<sup>133</sup> So called in the operation orders. While reorganising the 1st Royal Scots Fusiliers to resume the advance, their commander, Lieut.-Col. N. McD. Teacher (Edinburgh), was killed.

however, ran only 200 yards short of the crest. The Anzac flank was fully supported. Further north the whole objective was gained, and the hill was to be again attacked at 6.30.

Before the barrage ended, the 4th Division's front was consolidated.<sup>134</sup> The harassing machine-gun fire was combated by the 4th Brigade's Stokes mortars.<sup>135</sup> The first sign of counter-attack was detected at 1.20, when an airman saw a battalion of Germans approaching the far side of Broodseinde Ridge. At 3 o'clock the 4th Brigade reported Germans concentrating in large numbers opposite its front. A German barrage was falling close behind its line. At 3.25 Captain Jacka fired the S.O.S. signal. The artillery answered immediately,<sup>136</sup> and no counter-attack came through. At 4 o'clock the 13th Brigade reported a concentration opposite its front also, but the S.O.S. was not fired, the movement being stopped by the ordinary protective barrage and by machine-gun fire.



The movement seen by the 4th Australian Division was the attempted counter-attack by the southern counter-attack division (236th) of the Ypres Group. This group also had fully expected the attack. It knew that the British had relieved their divisions and advanced their artillery, and it had observed that the pillboxes of the Flanders Line were being methodically bombarded. When the blow fell, the 234th and 236th

<sup>134</sup> In order to get the work done before the enemy recovered, the 13th Battalion, holding the 4th Brigade's old front line, had at zero begun cutting a communication trench through the summit of Anzac Ridge, and continued it as a track across the lower ground. In two hours this route was open as far as the first objective.

Arrangements for consolidation this day were much the same as on Sept. 20. In the 15th Brigade's sector a track to the front was made by the 15th Field Company, Lieut. G. Pritchard (Mosman, N.S.W.) siting it as the infantry advanced, Lieut. A. T. Ewart (Mosman) laying a tape along it, and sappers placing stakes at every 50 yards. A second track was afterwards made. In the 14th Brigade Lieut. Fry and a working party extended the 1st Division's "Glencorse track" to the Butte. In the 4th Division the 4th and 13th Field Companies constructed marked tracks in their respective sectors.

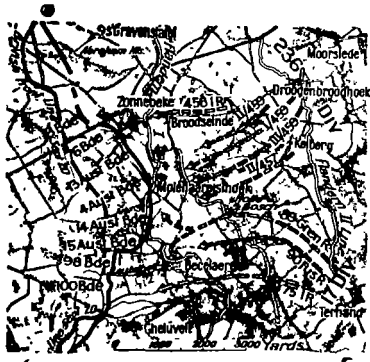
As on Sept. 20, strong-posts were dug on preordained sites. (On the right, however, one could not be established and another proved too swampy.) In both divisions each brigade took forward only 8 machine-guns, and this number was found to be ample.

<sup>135</sup> A dangerous German machine-gun on the right had been captured by Sgt. J. J. Dwyer (Alonnah, South Bruny I., Tas.), of the 4th M.G. Coy., who put it out of action with his own gun, went forward and brought it in, and subsequently used it together with his own. He was awarded the Victoria Cross.

<sup>136</sup> The artillery's fire on the S.O.S. line had prudently been tested at 1.30 on the 4th Brigade's front, and at 2.30 on that of the 13th Brigade. An endeavour had been made to do the same for the 14th Brigade, but the German shelling of Polygon Wood prevented quick communication, and the messages were late. Whether the short shooting which afterwards occurred there could have been avoided by means of this test, is uncertain—efforts to remedy it later failed.

Divisions were at once allotted to the 3rd Reserve Division for counter attack, and the 4th Bavarian to the 23rd Reserve, further north.<sup>137</sup>

The 236th Division assembled by 10 o'clock, as shown in the marginal sketch. At 11.30 it ordered the counter-attack, and at 1.20 the 459th I.R., with the 457th on its left, began to move across the open from the Ketberg to Broodseinde Ridge. They were seen by British aeroplanes, one of which was shot down by German airmen. The 458th was apparently in position earlier, north-east of Zonnebeke. The other two regiments had to pass through the gas-shelling and barrages laid down at some points by the Anzac artillery, but were not much hindered, and, at 2.30, extended on the road along the Broodseinde crest.



The counter-attack of these regiments was made by four battalions, I/458th, I and III/459th, and II/457th, with the II/459th in close support behind the ridge. Crossing the crest, it came under shrapnel and "lively" machine-gun fire, especially from the southern flank. The II/457th, which was to have attacked the northern end of Polygon Wood, swerved northwards, crowding on to the III and I/459th. In spite of losses, the advance continued until it came on remnants of the line battalions holding out behind the still partly-uncut wire of the Flanders I Line. German accounts say that at Zonnebeke the 34th Fusilier (presumably reinforced) drove back part of the British line, and that advanced troops retired in the Anzac sector also. If so, the latter were either the covering posts or souvenir hunters, for the counter-attack did not come within 250 yards of the 4th Division's objective. A second effort by the 457th only reached the existing front line of the 49th R.I.R. at Molenaerelsthoek.

It was possibly the movement last mentioned that caused the S.O.S. signal to be fired at 6 p.m. by the 4th Australian Brigade. Counter-attacks by other German divisions were then in progress or threatening further south and further north. The artillery of both sides opened, and the front of the Second and Fifth Armies was quickly drowned in dust and smoke. Seeing that no second signal came from his front, Brigadier-General Glasgow of the 13th Brigade, a singularly level-headed commander, stopped the guns firing there, but, in all, a vast amount of ammunition was expended.<sup>138</sup> By 8.15 the front was quiet; against the 4th Division no counter-attack had come through.

<sup>137</sup> The German official monograph states that the front of attack extended nearly 2 miles further north than it actually did.

<sup>138</sup> Some batteries which opened at 4 o'clock did not cease till 8. This day the 45th Battery fired 4,050 rounds (as against 2,388 on Sept. 20), and the 47th 4,580, and, on the German side, the Ypres Corps alone expended nearly 300,000 shells.

On the Windmill Cabaret hill, however, the 4th Bavarian Division had counter-attacked against the 3rd British, which happened at that moment to be making its fresh attempt to seize the hill. The 3rd Division's order had not reached all the troops, and its line, starting badly, was driven back, rallied, and remained lower down the hill. At one time a passing anxiety as to the safety of the Australian left was dispelled by a message from a Scottish officer. "We are at . . . .," he wrote, giving the map reference for his position, "and we are staying there." Accepting the recommendation of the divisional commander, General Gough then decided to leave this crest to be secured at the next main stroke. Like so many positions supposed to be vital, it proved not to be vital at all.

With this exception—the sole result of costly efforts by four German counter-attack divisions—the whole objective of the British attack was secured.<sup>139</sup> This was largely due to

<sup>139</sup> The Australian losses were:

<i>4th Australian Division</i>			
4th Infantry Brigade		12th Infantry Brigade	
	Off. O.R.		Off. O.R.
13th Bn. ..	4 102	45th Bn. ..	4 63
14th Bn. ..	7 106	46th Bn. ..	2 30
15th Bn. ..	9 137	47th Bn. ..	— 43
16th Bn. ..	7 141	48th Bn. ..	— 27
4th F. Coy. Eng. 1	7	12th F. Coy. —	—
4th M.G. Coy. 1	12	Eng. ..	6
4th L.T.M. Bty. —	11	12th M.G. Coy. 4	21
4th Fld. Amb. 1	5	12th L.T.M. Bty. —	1
	30 581	12th Fld. Amb. —	7
			10 198
4th D.H.Q. ..	— 12	Engrs. ..	— 11
Artillery ..	11 159	4th Div. Sig. —	—
		Coy. ..	— 10
<i>5th Australian Division</i>			
8th Infantry Brigade		14th Infantry Brigade	
	Off. O.R.		Off. O.R.
29th Bn. ..	12 292	53rd Bn. ..	7 298
30th Bn. ..	2 148	54th Bn. ..	3 179
31st Bn. ..	14 402	55th Bn. ..	10 219
32nd Bn. ..	2 122	56th Bn. ..	14 241
8th F. Coy. Eng. 1	9	14th F. Coy. —	—
8th M.G. Coy. 3	33	Eng. ..	33
8th L.T.M. Bty. 1	9	14th M.G. Coy. 3	53
8th Fld. Amb. —	16	14th L.T.M. Bty. —	19
	35 1031	14th Fld. Amb. 3	19
			40 1061
Artillery ..	15 220	5th Pioneer Bn. 4	77
<i>13th Infantry Brigade</i>			
	Off. O.R.		Off. O.R.
49th Bn. ..	6 106	57th Bn. ..	11 269
50th Bn. ..	5 216	58th Bn. ..	5 263
51st Bn. ..	6 118	59th Bn. ..	5 264
52nd Bn. ..	2 104	60th Bn. ..	11 275
13th F. Coy. —	—	15th F. Coy. —	—
Eng. ..	1 7	Eng. ..	1 28
13th M.G. Coy. 4	38	15th M.G. Coy. 3	44
13th L.T.M. Bty. 1	13	15th L.T.M. Bty. —	15
13th Fld. Amb. —	2	15th Fld. Amb. —	9
	25 604		36 1167
		25th M.G. Coy. 5	19
		5th Div. Sig. —	—
		Coy. ..	— 11

In addition, the casualties in the heavy artillery operating with the corps were 7 officers and 284 other ranks; the 13th Light Horse lost 2 officers and 14 others;

the perfect protection afforded by the artillery, but also largely to the vigour with which the 15th Brigade and the troops reinforcing it snatched complete success from an almost desperate situation on the right. Elliott himself, if asked, would have said that the counter-attack at Villers-Bretonneux seven months later was the fight of his lifetime, but most of his subordinates would probably answer for him "Polygon Wood." His staunchness and vehemence, and power of instilling those qualities into his troops, had turned his brigade into a magnificently effective instrument; and the driving force of this stout-hearted leader in his inferno at Hooge throughout the two critical days was in a large measure responsible for this victory.<sup>140</sup>

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1st Aust. Tunnelling Coy., 1 and 9; Canadian Tunnelling Coys., 3 and 13. The 3rd British Division lost 3,532.

On the German side, the 50th Reserve Division lost 1,850 (229th R.I.R., 1,152; 230th, 605). Of the 236th Division, the 459th I.R. appears to have had only 335 casualties (it had lost 550 on Sept. 20). The comparative slightness of its loss was partly due to the fact that its attack was not sufficiently dangerous to warrant the laying down of a full S.O.S. barrage. The casualties of the 3rd Reserve and 17th Divisions are not stated in the available records.

<sup>140</sup> It was typical of Elliott that he followed up this success by forwarding an ably compiled and very detailed report. It contained, however, besides strong criticism of his seniors, many downright statements concerning the division on his right. These statements, though he believed them to be true, were definitely untrue and grossly unfair. Birdwood, with justice, refused to accept the report and to include it in the official records, but a copy survived.

## CHAPTER XX

### THIRD STEP—BROODSEINDE

THE importance of the Battle of Broodseinde, the third consecutive step in this series, has never been fully recognised except by the commanders and forces that took part. For the general public, accustomed to over- or under-emphasis in the press, there was little in the published news to indicate that this blow counted for more than others. But on the actual field both British and Germans were aware that the events of the 4th of October, 1917, were big with possibilities of decision. In the air was the unmistakable feeling, not to be experienced again by the A.I.F. until the 8th of August, 1918, that the British leaders now had the game in hand and, if conditions remained favourable, might in a few more moves secure a victory which would have its influence on the issue of the war. Even in the light of today's fuller knowledge of the general situation, close study of this battle justifies that conviction.

In the days following the step of September 26th there was ample evidence of the effect of that blow. Ahead of the 5th Australian Division's new front at the Butte, the Germans appeared hardly to know where their own front lay. On September 28th, as dawn broke, the front posts of the 30th Battalion found, crouched in the crater-field under their very muzzles, a company of German infantry. Imagining that these troops intended to attack, the 30th fired an S.O.S. flare, and the artillery opened. But, far from attacking, the Germans made signals of surrender when fired on, and patrols rounded up the lot, 2 officers and 63 men of the 1/73rd R.I.R. It was evident that they had lost their way, and the prisoners confirmed this.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The 17th German Division, which had reinforced the 50th Reserve Division during the fight of the 26th, was in its turn being relieved by the 19th Reserve Division to which this regiment belonged. The diary of an officer, who himself was captured a few days later, says: "It is impossible to stick one's head out by day. One of our men was sniped immediately . . . . An entire detachment from our battalion got lost in the maze of trenches and walked straight into the arms of the English. Through the telescope I could see them being marched away in column of fours."

The entry immediately preceding this gives the writer's first impression on arrival at this front: "Just the sort of place for us to come to after our glorious time in Russia. Is it not monstrous? Division after division is thrown into this part of the line to come out decimated a few days later. All that the newspapers tell us . . . is that the enemy has obtained trifling local successes. It is no longer possible to believe these reports."

In contrast to the condition of the Germans, the 56th Australian Battalion, which on the 26th had captured the front beyond Polygon Butte, had actually asked not to be relieved, the activity of the front line being preferable to being shelled in the support position. Both it and the 55th were therefore left in the front line until their division was relieved on September 30th.

From the beginning of the Second Army's offensive it had been recognised that the third step would be the most important.<sup>2</sup> The objective was the northward-tending section of the main ridge known as the "Broodseinde Ridge," which, since its abandonment by the British after the Second Battle of Ypres, in 1915, had formed the main buttress of the German position there. Crowded with headquarters and observation post, it looked out on the famous British salient as on a spread-out map. For the operation in which it would be attacked, Generals Plumer and Harington had from the first intended to avail themselves of the assistance of the II Anzac Corps, preferably upon the left of I Anzac. Birdwood and White, however, had doubted whether any of the I Anzac divisions would last until the third attack, their experience of the Somme fighting having shown that each might be worn out in its first operation. General Godley, of II Anzac, was accordingly informed that his divisions might have to succeed to I Anzac's task after the second step.

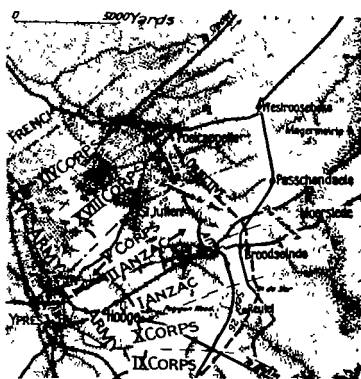
But the 1st and 2nd Australian Divisions came through the first step so fresh that it was at once decided to employ them, after a short rest, for making the main attack on Broodseinde Ridge. A conference of the corps staffs with General Harington, held on September 21st, recommended that I Anzac should again be shifted slightly northwards so as to make a straight attack on this position, and that II Anzac should take over the front of the V Corps (Fifth Army) on the left of its sister corps, and capture the junction of the ridge with the Gravenstafel spur, along which the left flank would be thrown back. The X Corps would again buttress the right flank, this time by the difficult process of advancing beyond it to the end of the Polygon plateau at In de Ster and Reutel. In the immediately subsequent steps, II Anzac

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<sup>2</sup> Writing to General Monash and other commanders on the eve of this step General Harington said: "To-morrow's battle . . . will be the biggest of the war."



would play the chief part by extending the capture of the ridge to beyond Passchendaele. Presumably the Fifth Army, till then advancing on comparatively low ground, would next resume the leading rôle by attacking the Westroosebeke - Staden heights. At a conference with the staffs of Fifth Army and G.H.Q. on September 22nd, this plan, so far as it concerned the third step, was approved. And, as soon as the stroke of September 26th succeeded—on the same afternoon<sup>3</sup>—Haig gave the order for II Anzac to take over the V Corps front.



The II Anzac divisions proper—the New Zealand and the 3rd Australian—had only just begun to leave a far back area at Bléquin and Lumbres, and the date for the third step depended upon how quickly they could be brought up and make their preparations. II Anzac was at this juncture made up to strength with two British divisions from the Fourth Army,<sup>4</sup> the 49th and 66th, but it was not proposed to use them for this stroke. The date at first foreshadowed for it was October 6th. But, with autumn advancing and the weather risk increasing, it was decided to hasten the preparations, and to attack, if possible, on the 4th.

Thus for the first time urgent considerations of weather brought an element of haste into the preparations of the Second Army, which hitherto had shaped its arrangements with one motive only—to make a certainty of success. For I Anzac the preparation was comparatively easy—its roads for this stage had been made before the second stage; its systems of supply and control were in working order; its formations knew the ground, and the step-by-step attack had been so well practised that it was now almost a matter of routine, and operation orders and instructions largely consisted of references to those for the previous steps. But for

<sup>3</sup> After conference with Gough and Plumer at Cassel.

<sup>4</sup> The possible date of the coastal attack had been again postponed.

II Anzac, with short notice of its task, the preparatory work was much more difficult.<sup>5</sup> On September 29th, when the 3rd Australian Division began to come in next to I Anzac and the New Zealand Division farther north, the roads, foot-tracks, and telegraph installation in the V Corps area were not nearly as far advanced as those of I Anzac,<sup>6</sup> and the expediting of the attack left insufficient time for their completion as desired.

Between September 29th and October 1st the reliefs and adjustments of front were made. The X Corps relieved the 5th Australian Division at Polygon Wood, and the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Australian, and the New Zealand divisions (in that order from south to north) came in<sup>7</sup> on the front previously held by the 4th Australian Division and V Corps, and the two Anzac corps then adjusted their inner boundary between them, shifting it to the Ypres-Roulers railway.<sup>8</sup> The relief of the 5th Division was marked by the loss of one of the finest battalion commanders of the A.I.F., Lieutenant-Colonel Humphrey Scott, of the 56th, who had stayed behind to show his British successor the Polygon Wood front, and was shot dead while doing so at the Butte.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> General Harington afterwards wrote to General Monash that the way in which the 3rd Division made its plans at short notice and carried through the operation was beyond all praise.

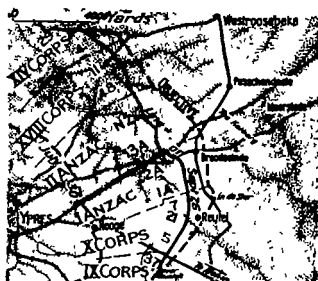
<sup>6</sup> For example, the head of the buried cable for the 3rd Aust. Division was at "Bavaria House," half-a-mile behind the Frezenberg-Westhoek ridge, when that for the 1st Division was approaching "Iron Cross Wood," nearly a mile ahead of that ridge. The II Anzac cable was extended in time to Zevenkote, level with the I Anzac cable-head, but the network was less complete than had been intended. The cable-burying parties of I Anzac suffered many casualties on the night of Oct. 1, but the work was finished the next night. The "bury" was supposed to be 7 feet deep, but, according to the diary of Private H. G. Hartnett (Batlow, N.S.W.), 2nd Bn., who worked upon it, "each man had to dig a piece 6 feet long, 5 feet deep, lay the cable, and fill the earth in again."

<sup>7</sup> Recent nights spent by these divisions behind the lines had been much disturbed by German air bombing. On the night of Sept. 28 at Reminghelst a bomb, dropped beside the tents of 28th Bn. H.Q., killed Captain Gill and three others, and wounded Col. Read, Major A. Brown, Major H. F. Darling (Geraldton, W. Aust., and Northern Rhodesia), and ten other officers and men. The following night bombs did great damage in the 3rd and 4th Divisional Ammunition Columns.

<sup>8</sup> The 2nd Division took over from the 3rd 800 yards of front south of the railway. All reliefs went smoothly except for a difficulty in ascertaining precisely where the right flank of the V Corps lay. Here Colonel Morshead of the 33rd, relieving part of the 3rd British Division, could obtain no precise information as to whether the British had a post at Zonnebeke church. He was determined to find out and, after spending several hours together with a British guide, crawling about the ruined village, "hopelessly lost" (as he stated afterwards), he ascertained that the flank definitely lay at the church.

<sup>9</sup> Scott, who before the war had been a clerk in Dalgety's office, Sydney, and an officer of the militia, had distinguished himself in barricading the trenches at Lone Pine, and at the age of 24 had been given command of the new 56th Battalion in Feb. 1916. He had made a striking success of his command but he had never been more successful than at Polygon Wood. In the 14th Brigade diary it had been recorded that, while all battalions did well, the 56th "have done excellently well . . . both from the fighting and administrative point of view," despite the fact that their adjutant had been wounded. Had he survived, Scott would almost certainly have risen to brigade command.

Thus, by October 1st, the two Anzac corps—four Anzac divisions—were for the first time side by side in the front line. Each of the three Australian divisions had a task about as extensive as those of the last two steps—an advance of 1,200–2,000 yards<sup>10</sup> on a 1,000-yard front. Their final objectives lay on the main ridge. The New Zealand Division, which would advance about 1,000 yards and seize the Gravenstafel spur, was allotted double the frontage. On the right the X Corps concentrated two divisions (21st and 7th) on a 1,400-yard front, in order to seize its fan-shaped and difficult objective on the heights, while another (5th) attacked in the Reutelbeek valley. The 37th Division (IX Corps) also would round off an indentation south of the Menin road. The Fifth Army would attack with two divisions (48th and 11th) of the XVIII Corps and two (4th and 29th) of the XIV. To summarise, twelve divisions and parts of two others would attack on a 14,000 yards' front, from "Bitter Wood" (south of Tower Hamlets) to the Ypres-Staden railway.



The reliefs had just been completed when, shortly before dawn on October 1st, the sector newly taken over by the X Corps in front of Polygon Wood was intensely shelled, and at 5.30 German infantry were seen advancing in three waves. The 21st and 7th British Divisions opened with every barrel that could be brought to bear, some of them from the Butte, as did the southernmost Australian battalion (2nd), just outside the flank of the attack, and most of the Germans were forced to shelter in craters half-way across No-Man's Land. A few came close enough to bomb an Australian post. But only south-east of Polygon Wood did some reach the British line; here they retook Cameron Covert, which Colonel Norman Marshall had seized on September 27th in advance of the objective set for him. In the afternoon a second effort was seen to be made, after bombardment, but it failed completely.

The importance of this attack was not realised until statements from prisoners made it clear. It was an attempt to regain, after

<sup>10</sup> The right (1st Division) would go 1,200–1,800 yards, the 2nd 1,800–1,900, the 3rd, 1,900–2,100.

full preparation, the ground lost on the 26th at Polygon Wood. Two fresh counter-attack divisions, the 45th Reserve of the Ypres Corps, and the 8th of the Wytshaete Corps, each contributed a regiment—the 210th R.I.R. and 93rd I.R. respectively. These, with 12 storm-sections of the Fourth Army's storm-battalion (to attack the pillboxes) and several *minenwerfer* companies, formed a special force under command of General von Gabain of the 17th Division.<sup>11</sup> The history of the 210th R.I.R. says that its troops on the right only advanced 140 yards, and those in the centre less than 80. The renewal of the attack in the afternoon was ordered in spite of a protest from this regiment, which lost, in all, 6 officers and 350 others.

During this day and the two that followed the Anzac engineers and pioneers were largely engaged in extending the duckboards along the tracks for the approach march, but there was nowhere time to lay them the whole way, and the roads prepared for the next advance of the artillery could not be planked. The weather was uncertain, and slight misty rain in the afternoon of October 3rd gave some warning of the difficulties to be faced if the fine spell broke. "Even the little rain last night made the roads poor," says the diary of the 2nd Divisional Artillery. It adds that the positions to which the batteries were to be advanced (for the next step) would only be accessible in good weather.

On the recommendation of I Anzac, the coming attack was to be made in two stages, the troops first advancing to a line—known as the "Red Line"—100-200 yards short of the crest, and then, after about an hour's pause, rushing the crest and pushing forward to a "Blue Line" 200-400 yards beyond. The other corps made their arrangements to conform with this. As the railway veered to the north before cutting through the crest, the right of the 3rd Division (II Anzac) would in the second stage have to cross it diagonally. Each division attacked with two brigades. In I Anzac all brigades except one adopted the now normal method of employing one battalion for the first objective, two for the second, and one for reserve. In II Anzac the dispositions varied.<sup>12</sup>

The preliminary bombardment, as before, consisted largely of practice barrages with which, from October 1st twice daily, each corps swept the ground of the attack and the

<sup>11</sup> The 17th had counter-attacked on Sept. 26, and had since been relieved by the 19th Reserve Division.

<sup>12</sup> General Monash arranged for the 3rd Division two intermediate objectives, making four in all, and each attacking brigade used one battalion for each of them. In the New Zealand Division each brigade used two battalions for each objective. In I Anzac General Wisdom of the 7th Brigade, as on Sept. 20, used only one battalion (26th) to capture the second objective, employing a second (27th) to support it, if required, and to dig a communication trench and other works.

area beyond it. No other intense bombardment was to fall until "zero"—6 o'clock on the morning of the 4th—when the whole orchestra would strike up and the infantry would simultaneously advance. The arrangements for the great barrage were practically the same as on September 26th,<sup>13</sup> but the artillery of I Anzac was considerably less strong than on that day.

At least a day before the operation, all the Anzac divisions brought their hindermost attack-battalions east of Ypres, where most of them bivouacked in shell-holes during October 3rd.<sup>14</sup> The I Anzac boundary had now been shifted to the Menin Gate, which was used by both corps, and all three Australian divisions had their headquarters in the dugouts tunnelled in the ramparts, those of the 1st and 2nd being near

<sup>13</sup> The first 200 yards, at 100 yards in 4 minutes; thereafter, 100 in 6 to the first objective, and thence 100 in 8 to the second. The machine-gun barrage would begin seven minutes after zero. While the infantry dug in at the first objective, the heavy artillery barrage would, in 30 minutes, wander 1,000 yards into German territory and then suddenly return. At the final objective it would cease for a few minutes in order to allow its lines to be adjusted, and would then descend in three consecutive barrages, each lasting 45 minutes and sweeping forward 1,500 yards, with comparatively quiet intervals of an hour between. The continuous protective barrage of the field artillery would have ended at 11.29, but the last barrage of the "heavies" would not cease until 1.44 p.m.

The artillery, no longer having to deal with the valleys on the southern flank, had lost a double bombardment-group, transferred to X Corps. In the right sector the 1st and 5th Divisional Artilleries (4 brigades), returning from rest, had replaced the five brigades (3rd Div. Arty. and the three "army" brigades). II Anzac, having a larger front, was supported by a much stronger artillery, including most of the British field artillery that had been serving with the V Corps. The artillery now was—

*I Anzac—Heavy Artillery:* One double bombardment-group and two double counter-battery groups (as for Sept. 26, less 53rd and 24th H.A.G's.). *Field Artillery* (eight brigades) right division—1st and 2nd Bdes. (1st Div. Arty.) and 13th and 14th (5th Div. Arty.); left division—10th and 11th Bdes. (4th Div. Arty.) and 4th and 5th (2nd Div. Arty.).

*II Anzac—Heavy Artillery:* Two double bombardment-groups (33rd, 25th, 48th, 88th H.A.G's.), five counter-battery groups (2nd, 13th, 42nd, 69th, 70th), and a reserve bombardment-group (16th). *Field Artillery* (17 brigades, one, however, without guns). right division—50th and 51st Bdes. (9th Div. Arty.), 7th and 8th Aust. (3rd Aust. Div. Arty.), 40th and 42nd (3rd British Div. Arty.), and 64th "Army" Bde.; left division—1st and 3rd N.Z. Bdes. (N.Z. Div. Arty.), 245th and 246th (49th Div. Arty.), 38th, 86th, 108th, and 232nd "Army" Bdes.; also, until the night after the attack, 295th and 296th Bdes. (59th Div. Arty.).

At full strength, this artillery would comprise:

*I Anzac—heavy artillery, 152 pieces; field artillery, 192 (96 for each division).*

*II Anzac—heavy artillery, 227 pieces; field artillery, 384.*

This would give a concentration of 955 guns on a 5,000 yards' front, or 1 to every 5 yards. A fair number, however, were out of action, and the proportion of active guns was considerably lower than these figures imply.

<sup>14</sup> As the 3rd Battalion came up near Hooze on the night of Oct. 2, a German airman dropped two bombs on the tail of the column, killing or wounding 17 men of the battalion and of the 1st L.T.M. Battery.

the Lille Gate, and those of the 3rd at the Menin Gate.<sup>15</sup> At various hours after dusk on October 3rd the troops began to march to their tapes.

In sharp contrast to their experience in the piecemeal fighting of the Somme, the troops of the 1st and 2nd Australian Divisions, after carrying out one great attack a fortnight before, advanced to this second operation in exuberant spirits. It was not merely that the days of those repeated batterings against isolated, narrow sectors appeared to have passed for ever, and that these well-planned operations on wide fronts were almost welcomed in comparison. But this night four Anzac divisions were marching to the line together. There were indications that the British command had caught some glimpse of the true reason lying behind the constant importunings of the Australian authorities that their troops should be kept together, rather than dealt with as if they represented some portion of the United Kingdom.<sup>16</sup> But it had certainly no conception of all that this meant to the troops then making their way through the dark.

We are to have N.Z., 3rd, 2nd, 1st Australian Divisions in line (noted an Australian in his diary). . . . The 3rd beside the 2nd and 1st will make a splendid combination—all keen to win and keep their reputations and their place in the force. It will bring the 3rd Division among their fellows at one step. . . . We passed the 3rd Division (11th Bde.) on the road . . . yesterday, and I must say they looked magnificent. I'll swear they knew they were passing through the 1st Division, and their sleeves were rolled up. . . .

There occur in the records several references to another satisfactory circumstance, that the division on the right flank of I Anzac was the 7th British, whose magnificent fighting quality the Australians had discovered at Bullecourt.

The chief danger was the chance of a break in the weather,<sup>17</sup> and, as the troops were moving to the front, it began to drizzle. Sharp, chilly squalls drove from the south-

<sup>15</sup> See Vol. XII, plates 410-11. The dugouts and signal services at the Menin Gate were insufficient for a full divisional staff. Major-General Monash accordingly divided his headquarters, leaving his administrative staff at Brandhoek, several miles in rear. Monash was the last commander to underrate the importance of his administrative staff, and his decision was probably inevitable, but, like that of Sir Ian Hamilton at the Gallipoli Landing, it placed that part of his staff at a disadvantage, especially when the need arose to deal with a breakdown in the scheme for evacuating the wounded.

<sup>16</sup> These requests had long been accepted as representing a well-known contention of the overseas governments, but the official mind had not been convinced of its reasonableness. The transfer of whole corps from one sector to another was an inconvenient process, but it was now being found to result in better fighting efficiency.

<sup>17</sup> The forecast noted that an atmospheric depression was passing, but predicted cold, squally showers.

west—the rainy quarter. At 12.30 a.m. it was raining lightly, and the battlefield was greasy, but not drenched. The moon, which was full, was hidden, and, from the points where the duckboards ended, the tracks, although excellently marked with tapes and stakes, were difficult, especially in the Zonnebeke valley, which lay close behind the jumping-off tapes of the 3rd Division. Its engineers had bridged the swampy bed at seven points with duckboards.<sup>18</sup> Some of these crossings had been destroyed by shelling, but most of the 10th and 11th Brigades, which had to pass there, found them, and those who could not struggled through the bog. The Germans close ahead were constantly firing white flares and coloured signals. The troops were accustomed to these signs of nervousness and were not in the least apprehensive,<sup>19</sup> but the approach of the 3rd Division was under close observation from Windmill Cabaret Hill, and was delayed by the necessary halts when flares were up.



Except in the 3rd Division, all the Anzac commanders concerned had decided to assemble the whole of their attacking battalions well forward, so that at zero they might quickly advance clear of the answering German barrage. But the space for the 3rd Division's assembly ahead of the Zonnebeke was very narrow, and General Monash gave his brigadiers leave to hold back the battalions destined for the later objectives.<sup>20</sup> The 41st Battalion was accordingly given an assembly area beside 11th Brigade Headquarters, 1,200 yards in rear.

<sup>18</sup> The 1st Division approached by "Jabber" and "Helles" tracks, the 2nd by "Harris" and "Rifle Farm" tracks (the last, in the old V Corps area, had to be hastily extended), the 3rd by "J" (Railway), "F", and "K" tracks, and the N.Z. Division by "No. 5" and "No. 6."

<sup>10</sup> Some shelling was experienced during the approach of several units. Lieuts. V. C. McKell (1st Bn) and J. T. Maguire (8th) were thus killed, and Lieut. A. E. Ballard (42nd) mortally wounded (McKell belonged to Waverley, N.S.W.; Maguire to Bowendale, Vic.; Ballard to Windsor, Q'land.)

<sup>20</sup> Apparently following the example of the 2nd Division on Sept. 20. That method, however, had now been abandoned by every brigade except the 7th, which used it only for a battalion (27th) charged with digging and not with actually attacking.

But on the actual night of the approach march Brigadier-General Cannan, having found that this area was constantly barraged, sent on the battalion to squeeze in behind the rest. The 40th Battalion had been similarly squeezed behind the 10th Brigade, and, crowded on the wet ground, waited for zero.

Thus in the early hours of October 4th the whole attacking force of I and II Anzac lay crowded about the front line, the foremost waves just ahead of it, the rear-most just behind. On the right the troops were very close to the enemy.<sup>21</sup> As usual the possibility of detection added to the tension, but the night was quiet until shortly before dawn. What happened then is described in the diary of an observer who, at the time, was making his way to a shell-hole observation post a mile in rear.

It was lowering and drizzly, and the German flares looked dull and glazed like fishes' eyes. . . . It was so overcast and drizzly that we could not see (the way). At about 5.20 . . . a yellow flare went up on the Broodseinde Ridge, instead of a white (as heretofore). It was followed by a couple more, and then sheafs of them; then others to left and right, spreading gradually. About seven minutes later, or less, the German barrage began to come down, battery by battery. By 5.30 it was really heavy—*crump, crump, crump, crump, crump*—like empty biscuit-tins banging down into the valley ahead and on to the Glencorse heights. Of course we thought the attack had been discovered. It made one miserably anxious to hear it, but we had heard the same at Bullecourt twenty minutes before the attack, when one had learnt that our men can attack even after such a barrage. . . . Then (at 6 a.m.) our barrage opened—tremendous. . . .

<sup>21</sup> In front of the 1st Brigade lines near Molenaarelsthoeck lay a bog of black mud, and it was decided to lay the tapes ahead of this, despite the risk of getting too close to the enemy. The process for laying the tapes was as follows: the brigade intelligence officer, Lieut. J. F. Barnes (Kyabram, Vic.), with the battalion officers, Lieuts. H. D. Robb (3rd Bn., Medlow Bath and Arncliffe, N.S.W.), H. V. Chedgoy (1st Bn., Arncliffe), and W. A. Tebbutt (4th Bn., Sydney), decided on a centre point for the brigade front. (Tebbutt was wounded before the actual taping began, and his corporal took his place.) This point having been chosen, Barnes ran his tape from it direct to the rear, to serve as the boundary between right and left battalions, and the officer for each battalion ran his tape along the intended front of his unit. The officer, holding the compass, would send one of his scouts with the tape as far as he could see him, directing him by tugging the tape—one tug meaning "go right," two "go left," and a long tug "halt." The tape would then be fixed down with sticks or clods and the process repeated. It required 50 reels to tape the brigade front. During the work Germans could be seen by the light of their own flares, and the Australians had to keep very low to avoid being sighted from the Molenaarelsthoeck pillboxes.

In the sector of the 2nd Brigade immediately on the left of the 1st, no tape was laid for the left rear battalion, the 7th, the intelligence officer, Lieut. W. G. Pollock (Brunswick, Vic.), being killed by a shell. Lieut. C. P. Clowe (Middle Park, Vic.) and the battalion scouts, however, guided the 7th to its proper position.



At the time, hardly a word of this German bombardment reached the various Anzac headquarters. The rain ceased, and at 6.58 news arrived through the 2nd Division that all was going well. At 7.20 success signals were reported to have been seen, fired at the first objective; at 8.55 they were seen at the second. At the same time the 21st Squadron, R.F.C. (attached to II Anzac), the first to send a machine struggling through the gale and low clouds, reported that flares (lit in shell-holes by the troops) were seen all along the final objective of its Corps: "Our men appeared everywhere at ease and not troubled." At 10.50 the 4th Squadron (I Anzac) reported sighting the electric lamp at some headquarters at Zonnebeke signalling "O.K.," and at 11.40 flares were lit for it all along the I Anzac objective also. The news from every other part of the front of attack was almost as good. The British line stood in advance of the positions lost in 1915; and reports from prisoners quickly made it evident that the success was even greater than at first appeared. It was reported to I Anzac Headquarters, and much later to II Anzac, that stubborn resistance had been met, but in the elation which followed, and the hurrying on of subsequent operations, it was not realised what vehement fighting had been necessary to secure success.

The difficulties began before zero hour. The German barrage heard by observers at 5.27 fell, as they feared, directly upon the waiting line of I Anzac, hitting the 1st Division more severely than the 2nd, but descending intensely upon both. The most forward battalions suffered least; where there was room, some of the rear lines edged forward to escape the worst of the storm. Most of the men, lying in their shell-holes with their waterproof capes drawn over their heads against the rain, simply had to endure it. When a shell burst in an unoccupied shell-hole, it usually did little damage; when it burst in an occupied one, the men there were killed. The intense bombardment was strangely confined to the 1st and 2nd Divisions; the 3rd Australian and the 7th British Divisions were not under the rain of trench-mortar bombs whose fuses their men could see flying over thickly upon their neighbours at Zonnebeke and Molenaarelsthoeke. When the day afterwards broke, the dead lay in groups along the I Anzac front. Numbers of the officers and men, including names

famous through the A.I.F., were never found again. Some twenty officers are known to have been killed by the bombardment, and about a seventh of the attacking force of I Anzac appears to have been killed or wounded.<sup>22</sup> Most officers felt certain that the assembly had been detected, but at the last moment the 25th, waiting on the edge of Zonnebeke, suspected another cause. Since 11 o'clock Germans had been seen continually passing across its front, and, although for some hours this was interpreted as a normal relief, its continuance and the weight of the subsequent bombardment convinced those on the spot that the Germans were about to attack. It was then, however, too late to fire the S.O.S. signal, since the artillery was forbidden to answer in the last ten minutes before the attack.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Most of those who were "missing" after this attack were killed in this barrage. Among the officers who, according to the records, then lost their lives, were (1st Bn.) Major Philip Howell-Price, Lieut. C. Farry; (4th Bn.) Lieuts. R. B. Bennett and J. Irvine; (6th Bn.) Lieuts. T. H. A. Boyd and E. W. Opie; (7th Bn.) Lieut. G. Heaton; (8th Bn.) Captains R. N. C. Kirsch and J. R. Davidson, and Lieut. L. G. P. Errey; (21st Bn.) Lieuts. J. S. T. Rigby and T. F. Heraud; (22nd Bn.) Lieut. F. G. Kellaway; (23rd Bn.) Lieuts. A. C. Brewster, J. O. Ethell, and N. J. Moore; (24th Bn.) Lieuts. F. W. J. Murphy, E. S. Worrall, and A. Wilcock; (1st Div. Arty.) Capt. J. R. Eddy. Among those wounded were (5th) Captains C. McE. Lillie and A. J. Phillips, Lieuts. F. W. Corlett, E. L. Wilcock (a brother of A. Wilcock, abovementioned), H. H. Sinclair, C. C. Hanson; (6th) Colonel C. W. D. Daly; (7th) Lieuts. F. S. Wyeth and M. B. Hambrook; (23rd) Lieut. R. Gordon. North of the railway, outside the area of intense barrage, Capt. F. G. Sims, Lieuts. T. H. Howden and C. L. Herbert (all of the 43rd), and Lieut. J. Larkin (41st) were killed. (Howell-Price belonged to Richmond, N.S.W.; Farry to Ashfield, N.S.W.; Bennett to Sydney; Irvine, whose correct name was J. D. Doak, to Kalgoorlie, W. Aust.; Boyd to Melbourne; Opie to Newtown, Vic.; Heaton to St. Kilda, Vic.; Kirsch, whose brother was killed with the 38th the same day, to Hawthorn, Vic.; Davidson to Warrnambool, Vic.; Errey to Camperdown, Vic.; Rigby, whose brother was killed later in the fight, to Telangatuk East, Vic.; Heraud to Collingwood, Vic.; Kellaway to Northcote, Vic.; Brewster to Stawell, Vic.; Ethell to Laidley, Q'land; Moore to Port Melbourne; Murphy to Fitzroy, Vic.; Worrall to Prahran, Vic.; the Wilcock brothers to Bendigo, Vic.; Eddy to South Yarra, Vic.; Lillie to East Malvern, Vic.; Phillips to Albert Park, Vic.; Corlett to Nullawarre, Vic.; Sinclair to Fitzroy, Vic.; Hanson to Kyabram, Vic.; Daly to Canterbury, Vic.; Wyeth to Inverloch, Vic.; Hambrook to Gippsland, Vic.; Gordon to Essendon, Vic.; Sims to Broken Hill, N.S.W.; Howden to Adelaide; Herbert to Papua and Adelaide; Larkin to Brisbane.)

Major Howell-Price, two of whose brothers (Colonel O. G. Howell-Price, 3rd, and Lieut. R. G. Howell-Price, 1st) had been killed at Flers and Bullecourt, had just returned to his battalion. In an endeavour to preserve his life, General Birdwood had appointed him to the 1 Anzac staff, but, on hearing that his old battalion was going into action, Price begged to be sent back to it. According to one account, Lieut. F. W. Goodwin (of "Goodwin's Post" of the 8th, who also had prayed to be allowed to take part in this attack), was killed in this bombardment. Lieut. Brewster (23rd) was the same who fought on Maxfield's right at Second Bullecourt. His company had for some days been holding the heavily-barraged ground south of Zonnebeke Lake. His last message before this fight was "This sort of thing is telling on the men's nerves, and a more active programme will be welcomed by all."

<sup>23</sup> Two independent observers reported that an S.O.S. signal was seen on the front of the 1st Division at 5.55 a.m. On this front, as it happened, at 5.15 a patrol of the 5th Battalion had brought in five German prisoners. They seemed very anxious to be sent quickly to the rear, and by questioning them it was learnt that they expected a German bombardment at 5.30. Captain Lillie sent them on to 2nd Brigade Headquarters with a message to that effect; but they made no mention of any impending attack.

So severe was the strain upon the I Anzac line that more than one officer in it wondered how his men would act upon the signal to advance. But on the moment when, at 6 o'clock, the tremendous British barrage crashed down, the German barrage stopped as if by clockwork. The troops, as they straightened themselves above their shell-holes, were, as if by a miracle, spared the explosion of German shells in their midst. With the casual manner that marked them in every battle, they lit cigarettes and moved forward.

Most of the right and centre of I Anzac had to cross a slight open dip before reaching the up-slope to Broodseinde Ridge. It was at once noticeable that the great barrage, despite its roar, was not comparable in density to those of September 20th and 26th. The ground was wet and the shells raised no dust-cloud, but only smoke and steam. Moreover, on the I Anzac front, the nearest barrage line—that of the majority of eighteen-pounders—was so much thinner that part of the infantry, thoroughly expert in following it, found it “hard to say if it *was* our barrage or odd shells falling short.”<sup>24</sup> The I Anzac troops, moving forward to catch it up, 150 yards ahead, had about reached it when, in the dim light, they descried, thirty yards farther on, moving objects which immediately afterwards were recognised as another line of troops who also were just rising from shell-holes. The strangers were extended at about two paces’ interval, far to right and left. Some were standing, some “moving about,” as if disconcerted, looking for an order.

Most of the Australians who saw them instantly grasped the fact that these were Germans. Many of the Australians (to quote one of their officers)

blazed at once from the shoulder; one Lewis gunner on the left centre got down at once and opened fire. The (Australian) line did not stop a moment. The Germans . . . . fired a few scattered shots and ran at once. . . . Some of our chaps shouted “They’re your own chaps—don’t fire.” A sort of a sudden fire of argument went along—“Mind your own bloody business.” Most of the men went on shooting.

At some points the Germans were advancing with bayonets fixed and rifles slung when thus met with. Their first wave

<sup>24</sup> This statement by an officer of the 8th Battalion is confirmed by numerous other declarations, including some on the German side. The 2nd Division reported that the barrage was not nearly so effective as on the 20th. “It was less regular, not so intense.” The howitzer barrage was dense, but did not fully screen. An observer noted that it “looked like a crowd of steaming plates, placed close to one another all up the hillside, white steam streaming from them against the brown earth.”

was largely shot down, and the Australians realised that on the other side of No-Man's Land a German attacking force must have been assembling at the same time as themselves, and the zero hour for the two attacks must have been the same; but evidently the Germans had arranged for their assault to be preceded by a half-hour's bombardment, whereas the British bombardment began at zero hour. The foremost German waves, like the British, escaped the heaviest of the bombardment, but the rear waves may have caught it. According to the account just quoted,

they could be seen through it running 100 or 200 or 300 yards away . . . too far for accurate shooting in this light.

The German dead, over whom the Australian line passed, and the prisoners first taken, all belonged to the 212th R.I.R. But the pillboxes and shell-holes, with which the attack came immediately afterwards into holts, were found to be garrisoned by the 4th Guard Division.

From prisoners it was almost immediately ascertained that an attack had been arranged on the German side against a front practically continuous with that of I Anzac. Later in the day many of the orders for it were captured, and these, together with several accounts since published in Germany, make the story fairly clear.

As was anticipated on the British side, the German command had been deeply disturbed by its helplessness against the British methods employed on September 20 and 26, and had made drastic changes (which will be described later) in its defence scheme. But one principle which it would not alter was that of maintaining an aggressive defence. General von Armin, commanding the Fourth German Army, truly contended that, even if the counter-attacks failed to gain their objectives, they forced the British to keep their forward areas heavily manned, and so subjected large forces to German artillery-fire during the days between the offensives. With less justification, he argued that the German forces lost no more heavily in counter-attacking than in merely waiting under the British barrages. Accordingly, in spite of the sharp defeat on October 1, it was determined to proceed with a similar enterprise on the Ypres Corps front a few days later.

It was a fresh division, the 4th Guard (old opponents of the Australians at Mouquet Farm, Flers, and Bapaume) which had urged this enterprise. Hurried forward to relieve the 3rd Reserve Division at Zonnebeke immediately after September 26, it was confronted with a tense situation<sup>25</sup> and decided that, for the security of the Broodseinde crest, more room was vital. If a German counter-attack had to move over that exposed crest, it would be cut to pieces. The British must be denied the opportunity of massing behind Tokio Ridge, and the Germans given the chance of assembling there. For these reasons, it was proposed

<sup>25</sup> On Oct. 1, at Zonnebeke, the 5th Guard Grenadier Regiment suffered severely through Australian sniping. The regimental history states, "as sufficient proof" of the accuracy of this shooting, that a sniper shot five starlings from the bole of the tree beneath which lay the headquarters of the 5th Company.

to recapture that ridge, from Zonnebeke to Molenaarelsthoek on the edge of the Polygon plateau. The three regiments of the 4th Guard Division itself (5th Guard Grenadier, 5th Foot Guard, and 93rd R.I.R.) would not be used for this offensive—a regiment (212th R.I.R.) of the counter-attack division (45th Reserve) would be thrown through them, strengthened with 16 heavy and 16 light *minenwerfer* to intensify the bombardment on the flanks, and with 8 sections of the Fourth Army's storm-battalion for seizing defences in Zonnebeke and elsewhere.



The three battalions of the 212th R.I.R. would attack from the three regimental sectors of the 4th Guard Division, whose own battalions would be maintained in position for security against a British attack. At the last moment the Ypres Corps specially ordered that no troops of the 4th Guard Division were to be brought forward in the operation, except to resist counter-attack, but all the infantry on the front of attack was grouped under the commander of the 5th Foot Guard Regiment (Lieutenant-Colonel von Radowitz), and was subdivided into two commands: in the sector of the 5th Guard Grenadier (Zonnebeke), the I/212th R.I.R. and 5th Guard Grenadier under the commander of the latter regiment, Major Freiherr von Schleinitz; south of this the II and III/212th R.I.R., the 5th Foot Guard, and the two northernmost companies of the 93rd R.I.R., under the commander of the 212th R.I.R., Lieutenant-Colonel Rave. The attack was first arranged for dawn on October 3; but, when the related attack of October 1 on Polygon Wood failed, it was postponed to the 4th. The objective was curtailed on the southern flank, and half of the III/212th R.I.R., being released, was ordered to attack as a second wave behind the centre battalion (II). A contact aeroplane was to fly over at 7.30.

The German bombardment began at 5.25, and ten minutes later all the *minenwerfer* and the artillery of the 4th Guard Division concentrated on the front to be attacked, while the artillery of the neighbouring divisions, to divert attention, barraged other sectors to right and left. Under this bombardment the three attack-battalions, which had assembled at midnight on the eastern slope of Broodseinde Ridge and had since been guided to the front line, were to push forward as close as possible to their barrage. But some opening shots at 5.25 seem to have fallen on the waves of the I/212 and on the garrison of the I/5th Guard Grenadier at Zonnebeke. Many were killed or wounded, and yellow cluster flares were fired in sheaves as a signal to the artillery to lengthen range. These were the fireworks noted by Australian observers.

At 6 the German bombardment lifted to allow the waves of infantry to attack. In order that they might work up very close, the last shells before the lift were fused so as to burst deep in the earth and scatter few splinters. The barrage was then to move 200 yards beyond the British line, and thence later to the back area. It is doubtful, however, whether these back-barrages were ever fired. The German artillerymen were bewildered by the crash of the British bombardment about them, and uncertain whether it meant an attack or merely a terrific reply to

the advance of their own troops. At the front line the waves of the 212th R.I.R. had not long passed through the garrison when their men appeared, running back with shouts, "The English are coming."

The meeting of the two attacks was attended by several interesting incidents. The attacking brigades of the 2nd Australian Division had to pass round different sides of Zonnebeke Lake, a bleak waterhole 200 yards long by 100 wide.<sup>26</sup> Here, in order to ensure that connection should be kept, a detached platoon from the 22nd Battalion (6th Brigade) south of the lake was to find touch with the 25th (7th Brigade) north of it, before zero, and a flank platoon of the 25th was to pass south of the lake. The 22nd's party duly set out, but its commander, Lieutenant Blanchard,<sup>27</sup> was never seen alive again, though some of his men afterwards returned, greatly shaken. Of the 25th, Major Page, passing south of the lake, saw a number of men ahead. Taking them for Australians, he walked up to them, and found himself seized and made prisoner.<sup>28</sup> His revolver was tied to his wrist, but one of his captors had hold of it, when a British shell caused them to scatter. Page fired at them, and escaped. The 22nd at the outset almost stumbled into Germans advancing with fixed bayonets. Lieutenant McIntyre,<sup>29</sup> who was directing the 22nd with compass, killed several with his revolver before he himself was shot through the head. Many of the Victorians fired from the hip, and here the enemy broke. In Zonnebeke, however, part of his line retired in good order, 30 or 40 yards at a time, his N.C.O's controlling it, and ordering rapid fire at each halt. Others, in cellars there, tried to fire with machine-guns into the back of the 25th, which had passed, but the cellars were quickly rushed by the following 26th.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>26</sup> The advanced post at Zonnebeke "Chateau" had been withdrawn at 5 a.m., in order to permit of a straighter barrage line.

<sup>27</sup> Lieut. R. Blanchard, 22nd Bn. Engineer; of Brighton, Vic.; b. Grimsby, Eng., 1887. Killed in action, 4 Oct., 1917.

<sup>28</sup> For the capture of prisoners, the German command offered rewards and leave, increasing with their rank.

<sup>29</sup> Lieut. J. A. McIntyre, 22nd Bn. Grocer; of Wonthaggi, Vic.; b. Clementston, Vic., 30 Sept., 1894. Killed in action, 4 Oct., 1917.

<sup>30</sup> Some were rushed by the headquarters party of Captain G. H. G. Smith's company, C.S.M. G. W. Seymour, who was wounded, shooting three Germans. Captain W. H. Gray, leading another company of the 26th, was also shot at a pillbox, but the machine-gunners were immediately killed by his men. Lieut. G. T. French also was killed here. Lieut. H. J. Ryan's company (25th) had to fight at the gas-works (see *Vol. XII, plate 383*), east of the village. (Smith belonged to Toowoomba, Q'land; Seymour to Stanthorpe, Q'land; Gray to Hobart, Tas.; French to Woodford, Q'land; Ryan to Port Moresby, Papua.)

In contrast with the experience of September 20th, on a considerable part of the I Anzac front the Germans fought at most of the pillboxes. Immediately after rolling over the enemy's foremost wave,<sup>31</sup> the 1st Division received fire from the Molenaarlesthoek pillboxes<sup>32</sup> and from ruins ("Retaliation Farm")<sup>33</sup> in the centre, as well as a considerable amount of shell-fire. In the 8th Battalion every officer in the left company was hit.<sup>34</sup> Germans were found everywhere, but their pillboxes were quickly outflanked and captured, and the line moved through the stumps of "Romulus" and "Remus" Woods, and the open crater-field, to the line of the first halt, half-way up the slope. In the 2nd Division the right brigade (6th) seized four large pillboxes. In one, at de Knoet Farm, the garrison refused to surrender, and was killed with bombs.<sup>35</sup>

The advance of I Anzac had brought it, in this first stage, across remnants of the Flandern I line, and many pillboxes had consequently been met; II Anzac did not at this stage meet this line. On its front the resistance came first from the crest of Windmill Cabaret ridge, where this had not been seized on September 26th. The II Anzac barrage was perceptibly denser than that of I Anzac.<sup>36</sup> An officer of the 43rd Battalion describes it as "like a wall of flame." The battalions of the 3rd Division did not differ from their sisters in following it more or less in one crowded line at the outset, the rear waves pressing upon the front ones in their haste to avoid the enemy's barrage. The 43rd, which led the right brigade, met Germans at once. On the right a machine-gun

<sup>31</sup> Shortly after this the troops came upon numbers of German trench-mortars in shell-holes. Many of the crews they shot.

<sup>32</sup> These lay so thickly that they resembled a village. After the attack had passed, many blockhouses still contained Germans. From one of these an egg-bomb was thrown, wounding Colonel Stacy (1st Bn.); but a single bomb in reply secured its surrender, and in such cases the enemy generally surrendered without resistance.

<sup>33</sup> Three machine-guns were captured here.

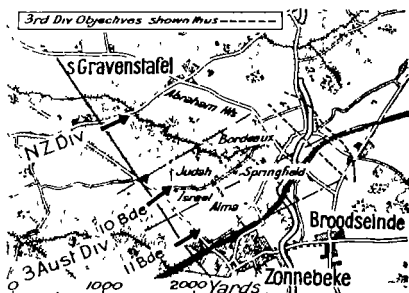
<sup>34</sup> Lieuts. G. F. Johansen and H. Ross were killed by shells, as was Lieut. H. J. F. Watson of the 3rd, and Lieuts. H. Gilchrist and P. S. Backman of the 6th. Lieut. R. W. Graham, of the 2nd L.T.M. Battery, as he ran forward with the 8th Battalion, was killed by the first bullets from a pillbox. (Johansen belonged to East Malvern, Vic.; Ross to Brighton, Vic.; Watson to Watson's Bay, N.S.W.; Gilchrist to Glenferrie, Vic.; Backman to Kew, Vic., Graham to Lewisham, N.S.W.)

<sup>35</sup> In the capture of one or more of these, the 22nd Battalion was assisted by the enterprise of L/Cpl W. E. Oliver (Moe, Vic.), 21st Bn., who went forward firing from the hip with his Lewis gun.

<sup>36</sup> "All reports agreed," wrote General Monash, that it was "excellent."

opened from a pillbox near Zonnebeke station;<sup>37</sup> on the left some post threw bombs from the hilltop. All were quickly suppressed, the Germans on the crest fleeing. On the left (10th) brigade front, the leading battalion (37th) had been shelled during the assembly, and to escape this had crept forward so far that, when the British barrage fell, its foremost men were within 30 yards of the pillboxes (Levi Cottages) on the summit. Machine-guns opened here too, but the blockhouses were quickly passed. A Lewis gunner of the 3rd Pioneer Battalion, Lance-Corporal Peeler, was observed to be particularly prominent in the advance.<sup>38</sup>

Both brigades swept over the crest and into the next valley, beyond which rose the Gravenstafel ridge. On the left there now occurred a splutter of firing around a pillbox ("Israel House"). German bombs were bursting ten yards in front of the shooting Victorians, but a party could be seen working round through a hollow. The smoke of a phosphorus bomb appeared behind the pillbox. Resistance ceased, and the line swept on. The 10th Brigade was here bearing to the left, but presently two objects recognisable in the half-light—a blockhouse ("Alma") in the bed of the valley, and some shelters ("Judah House")<sup>39</sup> behind a hedge—showed its proper direction.



At this stage, in order to allow the New Zealanders to cross the bog farther north, the barrage rested for a double period, twelve minutes, and General Monash had therefore

<sup>37</sup> At this stage in the 43rd, Lieut. D. S. Walsh and, in the 42nd, Lieuts. J. P. Kelly-Healy and W. H. Comper were killed. All the officers in Walsh's company being killed or wounded, Sgt. W. Cameron commanded it until another officer, Lieut. I. G. Symons, took charge. (Walsh belonged to Wallaroo, S. Aust.; Kelly-Healy to Toowoomba, Q'land; Comper to Limpinwood, N.S.W.; Cameron to Yatala, S. Aust.; Symons to Alberton, S. Aust.)

<sup>38</sup> Sgt. W. Peeler, V.C. (No. 114; 3rd Pioneer Bn.). Orchardist, of Castlemaine, Vic; b. Barker's Creek, Vic., 9 Aug., 1887. He was attached to the 37th for anti-aircraft work, but he led the fight on several posts, and, for his gallantry, received the Victoria Cross. At Levi Cottages two machine-guns were taken by Lieut. R. J. Smith (Epping, Vic.), at the head of his men, and one by Pte. C. J. McCoy (Paddington, N.S.W.).

<sup>39</sup> In the fighting at these shelters, Sergeant J. S. Shilliday (Mildura, Vic.) and Corporal J. N. W. E. Dunn (Canterbury, Vic.), 38th Bn., were prominent, Shilliday bombing the place and shooting the machine-gun crew with his revolver.



placed here his first intermediate objective for the 3rd Division. The two leading battalions dug in, while the rest hurriedly reorganised, and then passed through. On the right boundary of the division the railway began to curve northwards on an embankment before cutting through the main ridge at Keerselaarhoek. Through the boggy crater-field its track was always a main avenue of communication, and shelters and pillboxes along it were now crowded with Germans. Many were brought in as prisoners by "mopping-up" parties, but some, with hands above their heads, ran in unsought.

After the short halt the right brigade went on in excellent formation of section columns, the 42nd (Queensland) Battalion leading. Its right crossed the railway and reached the "Red Line" after a little fighting.<sup>40</sup> Its left, however, was quickly held up by fire from the bed of the valley behind Alma. Perceiving that a dangerous gap had opened, the commander of the reserve company, Lieutenant Dunbar,<sup>41</sup> swung two platoons across the front past Alma, filled the vacant space, and seized three pillboxes which, if unattacked, might have held up the whole centre of the division. In front of the left (10th) brigade, the artillery barrage seemed to continue for twenty-six minutes on the line of the intended 12-minute halt, holding up the troops behind it. These saw on their left the New Zealand Division go splendidly forward, shaking out its lines, waves, and sections to proper distance and interval. It seized its first objective below the crest, and then pressed on into its own protective barrage on Abraham Heights (a section of Gravenstafel spur) in order to suppress active pillboxes there. At this stage the German artillery, which also had caused many casualties early in the advance,<sup>42</sup> began accurately

<sup>40</sup> Precisely on the Red Line were two pillboxes, known as "Thames." As the barrage lifted from these, Captain R. Skinner (Geraldton, W. Aust.) and Lieut. R. B. O'Carroll (South Brisbane), 44th Bn., who were then crossing the railway, made for them. A German half-issued from the left one, and then darted back. O'Carroll (a former stretcher-bearer of the 3rd Field Ambulance) shot him and pitched a bomb through the entrance, and 30 Germans surrendered. Sergeant H. Barr (Larne, Ireland, and Fremantle, W. Aust.) took the other pillbox without resistance. While the troops were clearing these dugouts, a machine-gun opened near by. It could not at first be located, but O'Carroll presently detected it in a hollow scooped under the rails of the line. He shot the gunners. Another machine-gun had been firing from a loop-holed pillbox. Lieut. W. R. Maddeford (Victoria Park, W. Aust.) made for the rear of it, but, finding that the place had steel doors, apparently shut, he was nonplussed. Another Australian, however, rolled a bomb through the loop-hole and smashed the gun.

<sup>41</sup> Capt. G. A. Dunbar, M.C.; 42nd Bn. University student; of Maryborough, Q'land, b. Oxley, Q'land, 26 Feb., 1895.

<sup>42</sup> Lieut. L. S. Dimsey (37th), Capt. E. F. Moore (38th), and Lieut. K. D. Speering (39th) were among those killed or mortally wounded by it. (Dimsey belonged to Geelong, Vic.; Moore to Bendigo, Vic.; Speering to Grantham, Q'land.)

to shell the 10th Brigade in the valley. At the same time from some position in the bog, difficult to see, near a broken red wall known as "Springfield," a German machine-gun was firing. Captain Moule<sup>43</sup> (37th) and his batman, making towards it, were badly wounded. Someone worked to its rear, and it ceased. When at last the covering barrage permitted the advance, the 10th Brigade, with the 38th Battalion leading, crossed the valley to the foot of the spur. Like the New Zealanders, the 38th had to suppress a machine-gun which fired on their left from beyond the objective.

At this objective (the "Red Line"), duly reached at times varying from 6.45 on the I Anzac right to 7.20 in the centre of the 3rd Division, there was to be a **The fight during the halt** halt until 8.10, for reorganisation of the battalions destined to attack the summit. But actually this pause saw some of the hardest fighting of the day. The Red Line for the 1st Division lay only 100-150 yards below the crest-line, which was thus barely in the fringe of the barrage; and from the numerous pillboxes, dugouts, and lengths of old trenches on the sky-line many Germans could be seen bolting to the rear. It was always difficult to keep Australians from following an enemy who was on the run, and numbers of men from the leading companies went on, chasing the Germans over the hilltop. Many of the troops, indeed, failed to notice the thin bursts of the protective barrage,<sup>44</sup> and, seeing through them the heavy artillery barrage still advancing, continued to follow it until recalled.

This occurred with the front companies of most brigades in the Anzac attack. On the extreme right, part of the two leading companies of the 4th Battalion, thickly intermixed with the 2nd Gordon Highlanders, swept over the crest, through the protective barrage, and almost reached their second objective. The centre and left of the 1st Division, however, were stubbornly opposed. Just before the Red Line

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<sup>43</sup> Capt. F. G. Moule, 37th Bn. Wool clerk; of Brighton, Vic.; b. Brighton, 23 March, 1889. Died of wounds, 8 Oct., 1917.

<sup>44</sup> This was so notwithstanding the fact that in the I Anzac Corps the usual rate for the protective barrage (one round per gun per minute) had been doubled for this halt.

was reached, German shells, well aimed, had burst among the battalions emerging from Romulus and Remus Woods. Even files of the 3rd Division's right, picking their difficult way through the bog and stumps of "Thames Wood," found themselves being accurately followed by "whizz-bang" shells. "By God, they're sniping us," said one of the crowd. At the halt numerous casualties occurred in the 8th Battalion.<sup>45</sup> Captain Traill, the thrusting, experienced fighter who led its line, was the first to realise that these shells were being fired over open sights. Looking towards the top of the ridge, he saw the flash of the guns, which other men were mistaking for the burst of their own shells. He hastened to warn the 24th Battalion on his left that they must on no account remain waiting for these shells to "lift," and he himself took immediate steps to attack the battery.

This, however, was only one of several sources of strong resistance. The section of crest known as Broodseinde Ridge—extending for a mile and a half north and south—was bare of trees or buildings. Its one landmark, the paved road from Becelaere to Passchendaele, ran along its crest completely open except for the occasional remains of hedgerows. But half-way along the ridge this road swerved in a semicircle round a large crater, made long before, presumably by the blowing-up of an ammunition dump. Half-a-mile farther north the main cross-road, from Zonnebeke



<sup>45</sup> Lieuts. J. W. Stubbs, R. C. Daly, and W. T. Poynton were wounded. Capt. J. C. M. Traill put Lieut. R. B. Glanville, and, when he was killed by a shell, Lieut. P. Lay, in charge of an officerless company. (Stubbs, who died on 8 Sept., 1929, belonged to Abbotsford, Vic.; Daly to Melbourne and Echuca, Vic.; Poynton to Illabarook, Vic.; Traill to Stawell, Vic.; Glanville to Timaru district, N.Z.; Lay to Ballan, Vic.).

to Moorslede, traversed the crest, and at the cross-roads lay the rubble of Broodseinde and the wooden crosses of a German cemetery. The southern half of the crest was narrow, at one point almost a knife-edge, but at Broodseinde cross-roads and farther north it was a quarter of a mile in breadth. Half-a-mile north of the cross-roads lay the cutting of the Ypres-Roulers railway. At this point the ridge veered north-east, to Passchendaele, beyond this day's objective, which there curved back enclosing Abraham Heights.

It was from the crater and from numerous headquarters and artillery observation posts, in sunken pillboxes and short trenches near the road, that resistance now came. A machine-gun firing from the crater (in which was a pillbox) caught numbers of the troops as they made for the crest north of it, with the result that here they could only edge gradually up towards assaulting distance.<sup>46</sup> The field-guns and other posts were several hundred yards north of the crater. About eighty yards before the road was a bank or terrace, and below this the 2nd Brigade and part of the 6th clustered. The German posts could not be outflanked, since most of them were supported by the fire of others.

But parties were organised spontaneously, men eagerly following the most vigorous officers and N.C.O's. Lewis guns and riflemen fired from the edge of the slope while rifle-grenadiers opened bombardment from the dead ground below. The most difficult position, at the crater, resisted for twenty minutes. Then thirty Germans in the roadside ditch (or an old trench) south of the crater were forced by the bursting grenades into the open, and, surrendering, streamed to the rear with their hands up. Parties under Major Taylor and Captain Annear<sup>47</sup> of the 6th Battalion now outflanked the crater and rushed it. For a few moments Annear, walking coolly round its brim, shot down at the enemy with his revolver while they threw bombs at him. Almost at once he was mortally hit.<sup>48</sup> The crater and pillbox were captured, but a

<sup>46</sup> Farther south, in front of the 1st Brigade, a troublesome machine-gun was suppressed by Corporal A. B. Macaulay (Newcastle, N.S.W.), 4th Bn., who with a Lewis gun worked round it. (He was drowned in 1919 with his twin brother, also 4th Bn.).

<sup>47</sup> Capt. H. N. Annear, 6th Bn. Last maker; of Creswick and Fitzroy, Vic.; b. Yapeen, Vic., 22 May, 1894. Died of wounds, 5 Oct., 1917.

<sup>48</sup> At the same time Lieut. W. A. Minster (Ballarat, Vic.) was killed by one of the shells that occasionally burst overhead.

group, mainly of German officers, had fallen back from it and continued to fight with bombs and revolver shots from a short trench behind the hedge on the far side of the road. The Victorians again turned rifle-grenades upon them. The road and every exit of the trench being covered by fire, the Germans could only die or surrender. They leapt into the open, and the Victorians immediately rushed them. All surrendered except one who had to be bayoneted, and died later. He was found to be the commander of a battalion.

From German sources it is evident that the crater contained the headquarters of the forward battalion (I) of the 5th Foot Guard, and also of the II/212th R.I.R. The commander of the former, Major Wegehaupt, managed to escape to the headquarters of the support battalion (at "Celtic Wood," down the Waterdamhoek road on the reverse slope), where he appeared about 7 a.m. and reported that both battalions had been overrun. It thus seems probable that the officer (a captain) who refused to surrender was the commander of the II/212th R.I.R.

Several hundred yards to the north of the crater a number of men following Captain Traill, Lieutenant Hickson,<sup>49</sup> and other leaders of the 7th and 8th Battalions were attacking the field-guns. These ceased to fire as the troops approached, but were stubbornly guarded by entrenched machine-gunners, as well as by officers and others with revolvers and bombs, in old trenches and a sunken pillbox and at a sand hummock beside the road. Cross-fire from the crater and elsewhere made progress difficult, but Traill, with Lieutenant Waters<sup>50</sup> and three men, crept up a trench near the southernmost gun, while Lewis gunners kept the Germans' heads down. Lieutenants Hickson and Lay and a few men similarly worked forward near a second field-gun. Before these troops made their rush, they crept so close that German bombs were bursting behind them. When they charged, a white flag appeared through a trap-door<sup>51</sup> in the roof of the underground pillbox. The place proved to be an artillery headquarters. Most of its defenders were shot down. The guns and all the positions defending them were taken, and the troops stood upon the crest shooting from the shoulder at Germans fleeing in all directions.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Lieut. F. Hickson, M.C.; 8th Bn. Horse driver; of Melbourne, b. Northwich, Cheshire, Eng., 25 Sept., 1891. Died 18 April, 1920.

<sup>50</sup> Lieut. P. A. Waters, M.C., 8th Bn. Engine cleaner; of Traralgon, Vic.; b. Rosedale, Vic., 1892.

<sup>51</sup> Apparently for observation by periscope.

<sup>52</sup> Many shots were fired at one stout officer, who ran ponderously in long stages until a bullet brought him down.

In front of the 2nd Division the eighteen-pounder barrage was noticeably denser and more regular than that which covered the 1st. But notwithstanding the danger of being caught in it, the sight of Germans fleeing over the hill-crest was too much for many of the foremost troops of the 6th Brigade. Part of the front companies of the Red Line battalion (22nd) and, despite their officers' efforts to hold them, a number of men from the 21st and 24th, which were forming up for the next stage, went on. Some temporarily occupied a trench near the road on the crest; others tried to turn round two of the captured guns and to use them against the enemy.<sup>63</sup> From near the cross-roads came sniping fire and at this juncture German reinforcements, hurrying towards that point, began to counter-attack. Signallers of the 8th Battalion, ensconced behind the hill with a Lucas lamp whose flashes, in the absence of dust, were easily picked up even from the distant rear, sent word of this to the artillery. Certain batteries were turned on, and their fire with that of the Australians on the crest, scattered the enemy.



*The arrow shows German counter-attack.*

Farther north mopping-up parties of the 11th Brigade (3rd Division) were gathering prisoners along the railway line in swarms beyond all previous experience of the A.I.F., rounding them up from every pillbox and other shelter. "Some guerilla warfare," as an officer of the 41st Battalion called it, went on among these positions.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>63</sup> These had only lately been emplaced for defence against tanks. Either three or four guns were taken by the 2nd and 6th Brigades. The Germans had removed one breech-block, and a second gun had been damaged. On Oct. 6 two gun-detachments were sent up by the 2nd Division to put them into use against the Germans. Only one was found to be usable. On Oct. 8 it was fired for registration, but its position was dangerously exposed, and in the intense German bombardment on the 9th it was destroyed by a direct hit, much to the relief of its crew.

<sup>64</sup> The 10th Brigade, which was late in reaching its objective, does not appear to have gone beyond it. While digging in, it was fired on by a machine-gun, difficult to locate until figures were seen stirring in a heap of brick dust, the ruin of an old farm. Rifle-grenades were then turned on them, silencing the machine-gun until the barrage lifted, when it was rushed.



46. THE CRATER ON BROODSEINDE RIDGE, SCENE OF THE FIGHT AT THE HEADQUARTERS OF THE  
1/5TH FOOT GUARD REGIMENT AND 11/212TH R.I.R. ON 4TH OCTOBER, 1917

*Just War Memorial Official Photo No E1034.  
Taken on 15th October, 1917*

*To face p. 856*



47. ONE OF THE CAPTURED FIELD-GUNS ON BROODSEINDE RIDGE

*Aust. War Memorial Official Photo No E1039.  
Taken on 15th October, 1917*

*To face p 857.*



All this fighting left many of the troops for the next stage with little time to reorganise. In spite of this, except on the 1st Division's right, where it was mixed with the 2nd Gordons, the officers during the halt managed to check direction.<sup>55</sup> Most of the troops who had gone ahead to the crest were hastily brought back.<sup>56</sup> Those of the 6th Battalion who had taken the crater were hurriedly reorganised along the road itself by Major Taylor, who at that moment was mortally hit, a loss sorely felt throughout the 2nd Brigade.<sup>57</sup> Farther to the right Major Brown had brought back, through the barrage, part of the 4th intermixed with a number of Scots. But Captain Judge<sup>58</sup> could not collect his men in time, and sent word to his colonel (who had ordered their recall) that he would get them into shell-holes and take the risk of the barrage.

The shock dealt to the Germans was all the greater by reason of certain events then unknown to the attacking force. Actually the German command, after the blows of Sept. 20 and 26, recognised that with its present tactics it was powerless against the British step-by-step method. Ludendorff, who, after every battle, discussed with the staff in Flanders the methods employed, this time hurried to Roulers, and on Sept. 29 conferred with commanders on the spot as to the steps to be taken. "Our defensive tactics had to be developed further, somehow or other," he writes. "We were all agreed on that. The only thing was, it was so infinitely difficult to hit on the right remedy." The complete breakdown of the current methods was explained to him with an emphasis not exceeded even in the British reports. "In many cases," says a summary issued by the 5th Guard Inf. Bde., "the counter-attacks hardly reached the front line then held. Heavy casualties were suffered and the whole thing was a failure, as our enemy contented himself with an objective

<sup>55</sup> The tendency to advance parallel to the slope at Molenaarlesthoek had caused the 1st Brigade and the 2nd Gordons to veer slightly to the north. About the centre of the 1st Division's front, Captain C. R. Pinney (Port Moresby, Papua) of the 6th Battalion led those near him strictly according to compass. Although his effort did not correct the divergence, it enabled it to be gauged, and the reserve company of the 6th was put in to fill a gap which opened there. Farther north some parts of the line which should have mounted a slope diagonally had gone straight up it, causing a break. These gaps were filled, both by bringing back the diverging troops and by putting in the supports.

<sup>56</sup> Near Broodseinde cemetery Captain J. W. Pearce (Ballarat, Vic.) of the 21st, after his vain effort to stop them breaking forward, had followed, and brought them back just in time to escape the intensification of the barrage at 8.10. Lieut. L. S. Marchant (Sale, Vic.) did the same in the 24th. How little these advanced troops heeded the risk of their own barrage may be judged from an extant message from Captain E. A. Davis (Footscray, Vic.) of the 22nd, who himself had taken his company to the crest. "We finished up a little to the left of our objective," he wrote. "Under cover of barrage we pushed to ridge and again met with opposition. Engaged them, when for some unknown reason word came from rear to retire, leaving our isolated party in advance. A small party of Fritz counter-attacked, but were beaten off. The coy. fell back to red line (i.e., its proper objective), where we are now digging in."

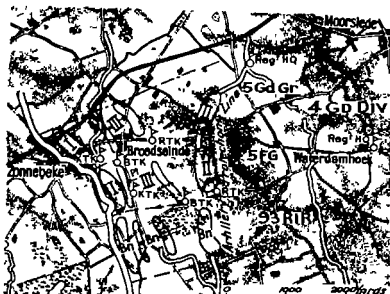
<sup>57</sup> Lieut. W. R. Booth (Werribee, Vic.) of the 7th was killed there at about the same time.

<sup>58</sup> Capt. C. G. K. Judge, M.C.; 4th Bn. University student; of Guyra, N.S.W.: b. Wandsworth, N.S.W., 12 Dec., 1892.

already gained." In this critical situation, although Ludendorff still believed in defence in depth, commanders on the spot, according to him, advocated a return towards the old system of holding the forward line in greater strength. Their hope was to disorganise the British attack at or before its commencement. At the same time, in the belief that the counter-attack divisions had usually arrived too late, it was ordered that they should be brought up beforehand, and their regiments distributed behind the front-line divisions. This would mean, says Ludendorff, the provision of "a second division for every fighting division in the front line, an unheard-of expenditure of force. . . . Our lines on other fronts would have to be thinned out even more than . . . hitherto. I said I would see what I could do." Despite misgivings on the part of his staff, he agreed to the tactical changes.

The altered method had forthwith been applied. The whole of each front-line battalion was concentrated forward, with two machine-gun companies attached and two companies of the support battalion close in rear. In the 4th Guard Division all these troops were assembled on or in advance of the Broodseinde Ridge, with the remainder of the support battalions close up on the rear slope, and the reserve battalions in the "artillery protection line" near its foot. In addition, since October 1 the counter-attack division (45th Reserve) had been alarmed almost nightly and hurried forward to an assembly position in front of Moorslede, only to be sent back to its billets during the morning. The dispositions of the 20th Division, facing II Anzac, were similar, and there too, on October 2, and again on the 3rd, the counter-attack division (4th Bavarian) had been brought up to Passchendaele. The Fourth German Army knew that an offensive was impending, and expected it on those mornings.<sup>69</sup> On the night of October 3, additional evidence having been received that it might be launched in the morning, the German commanders were for a time in doubt whether to proceed with their own operation. Eventually they decided to go on, the artillery staffs, however, being warned that they might at any time be called upon to turn to the defensive.

When the British barrage crashed about the battalion and forward artillery staffs on Broodseinde Ridge, and the regimental staffs on the Keiberg and at Waterdamhoek, they were uncertain of its meaning. The sight of fugitives of the 212th R.I.R. running past gave an early clue to some of the forward headquarters; for those on the summit, however, the first intimation of the danger of their own position was in many



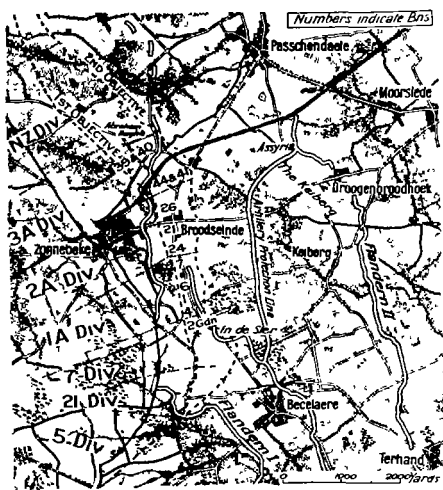
*Disposition of 4th Gd. Divn. on morning of Oct. 4.*

<sup>69</sup> The Germans had detected new artillery positions at Wieltje, Bellewaarde Lake, Hooge Chateau, and Zillebeke Lake. They had noted the heavy gas-shoots nightly on their batteries. Despite the bad weather, British airmen had actively reconnoitred, and British bombing aeroplanes, under escort, now attacked in plain daylight as far back as Bruges, Ghent, and Zeebrugge. A "very reliable agent" had on Oct. 1 given warning of a great impending operation. Prisoners stated that this would be launched on Oct. 2, and measures were taken accordingly, but it did not happen. It was again expected at dawn on the 3rd.

cases the appearance around them of the forward parties of Scots and Australians. Headquarters further in rear saw figures moving on the sky-line, some apparently British, others wearing German helmets. This again caused hesitation, and it was afterwards suspected that the Australians were wearing German helmets. There is no doubt, however, that the men in these were Germans, though possibly prisoners.<sup>60</sup>

It was the appearance of their opponents at this stage at various points along the main crest and at Abraham Heights that caused the German artillery so quickly to shorten its fire on to the western slopes of those ridges. The support and reserve battalions also were alarmed, and came forward automatically.<sup>61</sup> Headquarters of the reserve battalion of the 5th Guard Grenadier was in a very advanced position, at a sandpit only 700 yards down the Moorslede road from Broodseinde cross-roads. When the forward and support battalions were overrun, this battalion was the first to come up. Its troops were much split up in passing through the British heavy artillery barrage, but it was their two leading companies that counter-attacked the advanced parties of the 6th Australian Brigade near the cemetery. The regimental history states that the leader of the counter-attack, Lieutenant of Reserve Beck, was killed by a shell and the companies were much intermingled, but it is claimed that they caused the Australians to retire for a short distance. This retirement was probably the temporary withdrawal of the Australians by their officers immediately before the second stage of the attack. South of the Moorslede road Lieutenant Detlef von Hennig, leader of another company of the same battalion, nested himself within 100 yards of the road along the crest with a few bombers and two heavy machine-guns.

At 8.10, after four minutes' intense artillery-fire, the second stage of the attack was launched. On the front of the 1st and 2nd Divisions the summit was crossed almost immediately, without difficulty, except on the left. Their own shrapnel was now bursting very high; the gale was dispersing the smoke of the heavies; and the troops found



<sup>60</sup> Coming out after battle in 1916, Australians sometimes, in sport, wore "souvenired" *pickelhaube* helmets, which amused them, but they seldom put on the steel helmets. They knew the penalties far too well to wear either in battle.

<sup>61</sup> In the 5th Foot Guard at 6.45 a.m. a messenger dog was sent from the support to the reserve battalion with news of the advance against the heights, and a pigeon was sent to the division.

themselves looking out upon a landscape that had been hidden from British infantry since May 1915. To the right, where the In de Ster end of the Polygon height protruded and dipped to the plain, the trees of Becelaere clustered about its church spire. Straight in front lay the Keiberg, a smooth, green spur which left the main ridge a mile north of Broodseinde and, curving southwards, served as "back-stop" (with Moorslede hill behind it as the only "long-stop") against penetration beyond the main ridge. The ground on which the troops walked had been heavily shelled, the grass was torn by many craters, and the several woods down the slope had been broken and shredded. But the Keiberg lay green, and lightly fringed with trees. On the Flemish lowlands to the south-east, hedgerows and copses waved in the wind, and later, when the shelling died down, "carts could be seen moving, cows grazing, smoke going up from chimneys." Big shells were falling accurately on the nearer roads and farms, and some of the buildings were beginning to blaze. Nearer still, on the slope below the 1st Division, Germans were running, a few close ahead, lower down fully-equipped men in groups, making between the heavy shell-bursts for shelter in the woods, some turning now and then to shoot. To the left, a mile up the main ridge, the road led straight to the arched red ruin of Passchendaele church.<sup>62</sup>

While crossing the ridge the troops, especially towards the left, received sharp fire from German reserves that had come up the rear slope during the halt, as well as some direct shooting from field guns in the woods. On the right the 1st and 4th Battalions had little difficulty in finding their objective on the down-slope near a line of field railway.<sup>63</sup> The surface here was grassy, and all the soil on the ridge was sandy, excellent for trenching and well drained. The 4th dug-in in the open, partly behind German wire, and the 1st in old trenches. On their right the protruding In de Ster plateau was seized by the 7th and 21st British Divisions—in consequence of the swerve to the left the 2nd Gordons held part of the

<sup>62</sup> See Vol. XII, plate 393.

<sup>63</sup> Before reaching the crest, the 1st Battalion met machine-gun fire and had Lieut. J. N. Bennett killed and Lieuts. A. E. Tudehope, W. J. Johnston, and C. C. Judd wounded. At one of the hedges L/Cpl. J. E. Symington of the 4th had a rough-and-tumble fight with three Germans, all of whom he shot. (Bennett belonged to Mungindi, N.S.W.; Tudehope to Paddington, N.S.W.; Johnston to Annandale, N.S.W.; Judd to Yarck, Vic.; Symington to Wallangra, N.S.W.)

4th Battalion's objective. The British at In de Ster enfiladed all Germans who attempted to cross the lower part of the valley to attack the 1st Australian Division.

The 1st Division's left brigade (the 2nd), which had to go a quarter of a mile beyond the road, received distant machine-gun fire from the Keiberg.<sup>64</sup> At a dug-out 300 yards down the slope three German officers fired with rifles until they were wounded.<sup>65</sup> Through similar resistance in front of the next brigade (the 6th, of the 2nd Division) a well-known leader, Captain Pearce (21st Battalion), was killed as he launched the attack.<sup>66</sup> The brigade moved down the gradual slope, the right battalion (24th) making eagerly towards a hedge which, from the intelligence maps, it knew to shelter a German headquarters (this was the active headquarters of the II/5th Guard Grenadier at the sandpit). At that moment, however, several white smoke shells—the first of the protective barrage — burst half-way between, the warning for the troops that they were on their objective. "It would have been easy to go farther," said an officer afterwards, "had the barrage allowed it."

They dug in along the objective which was easily recognisable from air-photographs. Sharp sniping



*The first and second objectives attained on Broodseinde Ridge. (The dotted line at Daisy Wood indicates the part of the final objective not reached. In the 1st Divn's sector the actual posts are shown.)*

<sup>64</sup> Lieut A. J. Hyde, 6th Bn., was killed at this stage.

<sup>65</sup> The place proved to be an artillery headquarters.

<sup>66</sup> It is said that he was shot by a German officer at 100 yards' range, and that L/Cpl. P. L. Ord (Mount Cole, Vic.), who saw the shot fired, walked across, bombed the trench, killed the officer, and captured 13 Germans. Lieut. F. B. Collins (Kew, Vic.), 21st Bn., was killed about the same time as Pearce.

continued to come from close ahead. The Australian shrapnel was bursting much too high to prevent it, and in the 24th two well-known leaders, Captains Godfrey and Harriott,<sup>67</sup> and in the 21st Lieutenant Rigby<sup>68</sup> and many N.C.O's and stretcher-bearers, were sniped.

It was from the Moorslede road northwards that the real tussle of the second stage took place. As has been explained, the 7th Brigade was attacking its objective with only one battalion, the 26th (Queensland and Tasmania). A second, the 27th (South Australia) had been brought up by 8 o'clock to the rear of the first objective to support, if necessary, and to dig communication trenches. The objective of the 26th extended from Broodseinde towards the railway, including, as it happened, the point towards which nearly all reinforcements of the 4th Guard Division were directed—the Broodseinde cross-roads. As the battalion began its advance through the cemetery here, a machine-gun opened from the ugly stubble of "Daisy Wood" just over the brow to the right front. Lieutenant MacDonnell,<sup>69</sup> a well-loved leader, was shot through the heart and the advance was checked. Captain Smith<sup>70</sup> took charge, and the battalion made towards the wood, but fire from hedges and demolished houses slightly short of it caused so many casualties that part of the battalion's line was driven back to shelter in an old trench in advance of the road. Thence Captain Herbert<sup>71</sup> sent back to the 27th for 100 men, and at 9.50 two companies under Captain Gould<sup>72</sup> and Lieutenant Lampard were sent forward to assist him. Gould, an experienced officer of the militia, reached the old trench, filled a wide gap between the 6th and 7th Brigades, and then himself crept forward along a deserted sap towards Daisy Wood. After careful reconnaissance, he decided that

<sup>67</sup> Capt. G. Harriott, 24th Bn. Farmer; of Wickliffe, Vic.; b. Prahran, Vic., 4 Nov., 1891. Killed in action, 4 Oct., 1917.

<sup>68</sup> Lieut. F. Rigby, 21st Bn. Sawmiller; of Telangatuk East, Vic.; b. Telangatuk East, 1891. Killed in action, 4 Oct., 1917.

<sup>69</sup> Lieut. L. F. MacDonnell, 26th Bn. University student; of Gympie, Q'land; b. Gympie, 1896. Killed in action, 4 Oct., 1917.

<sup>70</sup> Lieut.-Col. G. H. G. Smith, M.C.; 26th Bn. Managing law clerk; of Toowoomba, Q'land, b. Ipswich, Q'land, 14 Sept., 1886.

<sup>71</sup> Capt. J. E. Herbert, M.C.; 26th Bn. General storekeeper; of Nerang, Q'land; b. Toowoomba, Q'land, 4 June, 1881. Died of wounds, 17 April, 1918.

<sup>72</sup> Capt. E. S. Gould, 27th Bn. Architect; of Unley, S. Aust.; b. Bowen, S. Aust., 13 July, 1893. Killed in action, 9 Oct., 1917.

his position in the old trench gave a much better view and command than could be obtained from the objective on the edge of Daisy Wood. He therefore kept his men where they were. While digging, they came constantly upon the uniforms of British soldiers, killed years before, and rightly guessed that they were in the old British front line of 1914 and 1915.<sup>73</sup> Lampard's company gained touch with the 6th Brigade. The left also was well advanced, in touch with the 41st Battalion (3rd Division).

The 3rd Division, attacking the junction of the ridge and the Abraham Heights spur, also employed only one battalion for the objective in each brigade sector, but with another battalion leading the way up to within 200 or 300 yards of the final objective and digging-in there in close support. The Flanders I Line ran diagonally across the ground to be traversed. The right brigade began to encounter it at once, and, crossing the old wire-entanglements in swampy ground north of the railway, parts of the 44th and 41st Battalions were unable to keep up with the barrage. Germans in pillboxes along the demolished trench brought machine-guns into action. A pillbox, "Seine," which proved to be another battalion headquarters,<sup>74</sup> was taken by Lieutenant Bremner<sup>75</sup> (44th) and some men working to its rear. Another pillbox was fired on with rifle grenades and then rushed by Lieutenant Fraser<sup>76</sup> (41st), who thus set free the checked troops.<sup>77</sup> In the 10th Brigade the 39th Battalion met fire from posts along an old switch line, and, while engaged with these, was stopped by machine-gun fire from the New Zealand front. A party of the 40th, following behind, together with a Stokes mortar, pounced upon this machine-gun and thus helped the 39th to seize its objective, but the barrage had by then gone ahead, and the

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<sup>73</sup> During the Second Battle of Ypres it seems to have been held by the 28th Division. The Germans attacked it on the day of the Anzac Landing, 25 April, 1915. The British line was withdrawn on May 3. (*See Military Operations, France and Belgium, Vol. II*, by Brig-General Sir James Edmonds.)

<sup>74</sup> A senior German officer was killed there, and a second, with 30 other Germans, captured. It was presumably the forward battalion headquarters of the 79th I.R (20th Divn).

<sup>75</sup> Capt. H. G. Bremner, M.C.; 44th Bn. Accountant; of Perth, W. Aust.; b. Ballarat, Vic., 26 Jan., 1885.

<sup>76</sup> Captain W. A. Fraser, D.S.O.; 41st Bn. Electrician; of Brisbane; b. Cliffe, Kent, Eng., 1882.

<sup>77</sup> In this incident 10 Germans were killed, and 21 with three machine-guns captured.

40th, although it went on without a pause, could not catch it up, and now met intense fire from the Flandern I Line.<sup>78</sup>

Both the battalions of the 3rd Division allotted for this final stage were among the finest in the A.I.F., combining fighting vigour with a special degree of orderliness, due to General Monash's careful handling. On the right the 41st (Queensland) reached with little difficulty its objective near Nieuwemolen cross-roads, the key of the ridge. The 11th Machine Gun Company at once established there two guns,<sup>79</sup> which, together with those of the 7th Machine Gun Company on the right and the Lewis guns of the 41st Battalion on the left, swept the farther slopes from the Keiberg to the railway. The objective of the left battalion (40th, Tasmania) lay, on the right, slightly short of the summit of the main ridge, but on the left just over the crest of the Gravenstafel spur where the Flandern I Line ("Dab Trench") crossed it. Although this trench was thoroughly broken and its entanglement passable, withering fire came from both the trench and the thickly-garrisoned pill-boxes. Ten machine-guns were firing into the 40th from front and left.<sup>80</sup> The Tasmanians could advance only by rushes, and suffered great loss. Captain McVilly, already wounded, stood out calling to the right company, but was again hit, severely.<sup>81</sup> Lieutenants Gatenby<sup>82</sup> and McMillan<sup>83</sup> were wounded.



<sup>78</sup> The 39th also received this while digging in. Lieut. D. G. Mackay was mortally wounded, and Lieut. M. Maxwell (brother of the Maxwells of Mouquet Farm and Messines) badly wounded. (Mackay belonged to St. Kilda, Vic.; Maxwell to Hobart.)

<sup>79</sup> Under Lieut. L. J. Parks (Perth, W. Aust.); he was soon wounded, but Lieut. Harvey Freeman (Geelong, Vic.), had already come up from the supports and took charge. Freeman was killed on Oct., 15.

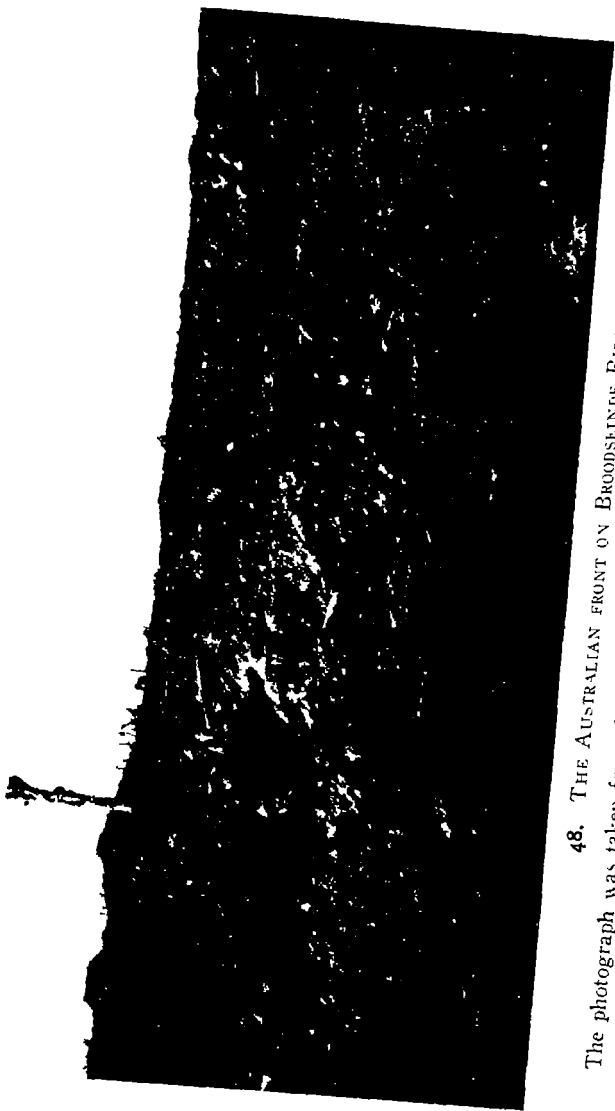
<sup>80</sup> Fifteen were captured by the 40th. Of these, seven, all of which had been in action, were found in the trench in front of the left company of the 40th.

<sup>81</sup> McVilly was the winner of the Diamond Sculls at Henley-on-Thames in 1913. He survived to join General Dunsterville's force.

<sup>82</sup> Lieut. J. J. Gatenby, 40th Bn. Pastoralist; of Epping, Tas.; b. Epping, 19 Sept., 1888.

<sup>83</sup> Lieut. S. S. S. McMillan, M.C.; 40th Bn. Engineer; of Sydney; b. Glasgow, Scotland, 17 May, 1883.





48. THE AUSTRALIAN FRONT ON BROODSLEINDE RIDGE  
The photograph was taken from the front by Lieutenant G. H. Wilkins on October 5th. The  
posts are those of the 24th Battalion.

*Aust War Memorial Official Photo No E1831*



49. HEADQUARTERS OF THE 24TH BATTALION ON BROODSEINDE RIDGE, 5TH OCTOBER, 1917

*Aust War Memorial Official Photo. No. E4513.*

*To face p. 865.*

The situation was critical, but Captain Ruddock<sup>84</sup> seized the one chance of outflanking the German position by working the left company round through some half-sheltered ground in the New Zealand sector.<sup>85</sup> By opening fire from there he suppressed the Germans in the trench, and a series of gallant attacks on those in pillboxes then began. From the roof of one of these a machine-gun was firing. Sergeant McGee<sup>86</sup> ran forward fifty yards and shot the crew with his revolver.<sup>87</sup> The next blockhouse, "Hamburg," was charged by Lieutenant Meagher<sup>88</sup> of the mopping-up company, who had advanced in answer to a signal to fill a gap. He was killed, but Lieutenant Grant<sup>89</sup> continued to lead, and the place was captured together with 25 prisoners and four machine-guns. The right was strengthened by Captain Dumaesq<sup>90</sup> with part of the reserve company, and, together with the neighbouring part of the 41st under Captain Redmond<sup>91</sup> and Lieutenants Fraser and Price,<sup>92</sup> it fought down pillbox after pillbox, practically every blockhouse being taken by some act of individual daring. After the objective was reached, a group of eight German officers or N.C.O's still fought on, in a pillbox ahead on the left, until killed. In front of the right Captain Dumaesq with some men captured two other blockhouses.<sup>93</sup> By 9.12 the 40th (with whom were many of the 39th) had its whole objective. On the left the New Zealanders, by fighting of a somewhat similar nature, secured theirs.

<sup>84</sup> Major W. C. G. Ruddock, M.S.M., 40th Bn. Member of Aust. Permanent Forces; of New Town, Tas.; b. Hobart, 4 Sept., 1888.

<sup>85</sup> A full account is given in *The Fortieth*, by Captain F. C. Green.

<sup>86</sup> Sgt. L. McGee, V.C. (No. 456; 40th Bn.). Engine-driver; of Avoca, Tas.; b. Ross, Tas., 1888. Killed in action, 12 Oct., 1917.

<sup>87</sup> McGee, who already had a famous fighting record, at once organised a bombing party to attack another pillbox, which was duly captured. He was recommended for a commission and for the Victoria Cross, but was killed on Oct. 12. The V.C., however, was posthumously awarded to him.

<sup>88</sup> Lieut. N. R. T. Meagher, 40th Bn. Law student; of Hobart, b. Hobart, 4 Jan., 1886. Killed in action, 4 Oct., 1917.

<sup>89</sup> Lieut. A. H. Grant, 40th Bn. Grazier; of Clermont, Q'land; b. Clermont, 1 Jan., 1889. Killed in action, 12 Oct., 1917.

<sup>90</sup> Lieut.-Col. H. J. Dumaesq, M.C., V.D.; 40th Bn. Farmer and grazier, of Longford, Tas., b. Mt. Ireh, Longford, 24 Jan., 1888.

<sup>91</sup> Capt. J. Redmond, 41st Bn. Commission agent; of Bundaberg, Q'land; b. Bundaberg, 16 June, 1876. Killed in action, 5 Oct., 1917.

<sup>92</sup> Lieut. E. D. Price, M.C.; 41st Bn. Motor mechanic; of Condah, Vic.; b. Homerton, Vic., 5 Apr., 1890.

<sup>93</sup> It is said that as Dumaesq reached one pillbox he felled by a hit on the jaw a German officer who emerged, revolver in hand. Leaving him there, Dumaesq went on to help in the clearing of a second blockhouse.

The whole objective of I and II Anzac (except for the small dent at Daisy Wood, which was entirely unimportant) had been gained. The troops were aware that they had won an overwhelming success. Had it been arranged that they should go farther, covered by artillery, either at once or after a short pause, they could have done so. But the step-by-step method forbade any such attempt, and one of the difficulties that would have been involved in it was evidenced by a certain falling short of the barrage of the 3rd Division, some of whose field-guns were now firing at very long range.<sup>94</sup> The orders were to dig in, and for this there remained two and a half hours before the protective barrage ceased. The 1st Australian Division fortified its line with much skill, deliberately adopting a system of unconnected posts. Six important ones—four on the crest, and two behind it—were specially laid out by the engineers, but the rest, forty to fifty in number, were irregularly situated in "improved" shell-holes or old trenches along and behind the two objectives. The 6th Battalion covered its posts, when dug, with light camouflage netting, with the result that they remained undetected by the German artillery. The 2nd Division made use chiefly of old trenches, which it quickly connected into an almost continuous front line, with covering posts ahead. The 3rd quickly dug, under supervision of its engineers, perhaps the most complete and accurately-sited front and support lines ever made by Australians in battle.<sup>95</sup> All the divisions strengthened their line with special strong-points, and cut, through the brow of the hill, communication trenches which, when complete, would allow troops to reach parts of the front without appearing against the sky-line.<sup>96</sup>

The almost immediate German reply to the attack had been an intense shelling of the area immediately on the British side of Broodseinde Ridge.<sup>97</sup> In the 1st Division's area a barrage

<sup>94</sup> The nearest guns were over 5,000 yards from the 3rd Division's line. They could not fire effectively beyond 7,000 yards.

<sup>95</sup> An officer of the 199th Brigade (66th Divn.), which took them over 36 hours later, told an Australian at Corps H.Q. that it was "a wonderfully well-dug position." Aeroplane photographs support this testimony.

<sup>96</sup> In wet weather, however, many Australians would not use them, preferring bullets to the mud.

<sup>97</sup> This continued with varying intensity during most of Oct. 4. Lieut.-Col. C. R. A. Pye, the fine young commander of the 19th Battalion (in civil life a doctor), was killed on the duckboards. At about 10 o'clock, back at "Potsdam" pillbox, headquarters of the 44th Battalion, a shell came through the window and struck the telephone, wounding Lieut.-Col. J. P. Clark and his adjutant, Captain C. H. C. Hillary. Major M. H. a Beckett and Capt. C. Longmore replaced them. Major W. B. Craig, medical officer of the 22nd, was badly wounded. The barrages were

was also placed upon the crest,<sup>98</sup> and field-guns, probably firing direct, sniped even at single men crossing the summit. Through the barrage behind the ridge not only runners and stretcher-bearers, but the parties for digging strong-points, marking tracks,<sup>99</sup> and carrying ammunition had to move; and in the midst of the barrage on the crest the 1st Field Company dug its strong-points. Yet every strong-point was duly dug; and the tracks were taped and marked—in the 1st Division not only to battalion headquarters but to each company, a precaution which proved exceedingly helpful. The front line was accurately mapped by surveyors, and lists of the pillboxes were drawn up, showing the available accommodation. Some of these places still contained numbers of Germans, including three more battalion headquarters and an artillery staff.<sup>100</sup>

On the right the Australians on the final objective were not disturbed by even a semblance of counter-attack; the machine- and Lewis-guns of the 7th British Division on the In de Ster promontory made organised movement in that area practically impossible for the enemy. Farther up the valley signs of an effort to assemble were constant. Behind the woods

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particularly severe on the 11th Brigade, Lieuts. M. Hart and A. W. Lambden (42nd), O. W. Crick (43rd), and Capt. T. H. Bone and Lieuts. T. L. Pitman and A. H. Bond (44th) being among the killed or mortally wounded. Pitman, signalling officer of the 44th, gave up his place in his advanced pillbox at "Thames" to allow some of his tired men to sleep inside, while he lay outside beside the wall. Here a shell killed him.

In other units, in addition to other officers mentioned, Capts. A. L. Hewish and R. I. Moore and Lieut. E. Clark (3rd Bn.), Lieut. H. Davenport (4th), and Lieuts. H. R. Hill and A. A. Scott (25th) were killed by enemy shell-fire.

(Pye belonged to Windsor, N.S.W.; Col. Clark to Hobart; Hillary to Kenwick district, W. Aust.; a'Beckett to Sale, Vic.; Longmore to Perth, W. Aust.; Craig to Warrnambool, Vic.; Hart to Brisbane; Lambden to Seymour, Vic., and Brisbane; Crick to North Adelaide; Bone to Boulder, W. Aust.; Pitman to Norwood, S. Aust.; Bond to Perth, W. Aust.; Hewish to Albury, N.S.W.; Moore to Emmaville, N.S.W.; Lieut. Clark to Paddington, N.S.W.; Davenport to Wongaroon, N.S.W.; Hill to Toowong, Q'land, Scott to Hornet Bank Station, Taroom, Q'land.)

The artillery also was fired on by long-range guns, which made several damaging hits. During the barrage the ammunition of the 66th Siege Battery near St. Jean was hit, and two gun-detachments were killed. At 8 a.m., just after a relief of the gun-detachments, the 55th (Aust.) Siege Battery, near by, received a series of well-directed 5.9-inch shells, which put out of action practically all the crews. The relieved crews, which had just set off for Ypres, returned immediately, cleared the wounded, and continued to fire the one gun that remained in action. This battery lost 20 killed and 40 wounded (a quarter of its strength) in three days.

<sup>98</sup> Lieut. N. P. Power (Gympie, Q'land), 4th Bn., and Lieut. H. W. Harper (Melbourne), 21st Bn., were among those killed by this fire.

<sup>99</sup> The commander of the 26th Battalion wrote to the O.C., 7th Field Company, that he saw Lieut. A. L. Polson (Sydney) of that company coolly leading a tape party "through one of the heaviest, and certainly the deepest, enemy barrages that I have ever seen."

<sup>100</sup> When the 22nd Battalion was mopping-up the ground taken by the 24th, Pte. B. J. Drewry (Bambura, Vic.) found two battalion commanders and their staffs—presumably those of the 111/5th Guard Grenadier and 1/212th R.I.R.—in a pillbox on the crest. In an armoured dugout a little farther south, Lieut. A. E. Tayles (Hampton, Vic.) found five artillery officers lying quietly, fully armed, apparently awaiting a chance of escape; from a third, Captain P. I. Stewart (Trafalgar, Vic., died on 9 Oct., 1932) took 39 Germans and four machine-guns. In front of the

in the valley, where lay the "artillery protection line," movement was continually seen. No sooner had the left of the 1st Division reached its final objective than hundreds of Germans were seen advancing only a few hundred yards away along the spur south of the Moorslede road, with numbers of others still running back through them. Farther back men appeared advancing like a long string of ants. The two machine-guns of the 11th Company on the crest turned on them, and at half-a-mile's range broke up the order of the advance. The Germans still came on, hopping from shell-hole to shell-hole, but could do no more than reinforce the sniping line in front of the 2nd Division and of the left of the 1st.<sup>101</sup> North of the Moorslede road the 26th Battalion called down the artillery on numbers of Germans concentrating in Daisy Wood. Captain Gould, in the old British trench near by, noted that the guns "got hits." Neither in that sector nor in any other did the Australians feel the least apprehensive; Gould's 80 or 90 men had eight Lewis guns and a Vickers machine-gun.

North of the railway, where the line of the 3rd Division began to curve from the main crest, the 41st Battalion had only been digging for twenty minutes when Germans were seen coming up in sections by rushes to the hedge of Keerselaarhoek cemetery close in front, which here bounded the battalion's view.<sup>102</sup> These Germans made some attempt against Captain Calow's<sup>103</sup> company, and were driven off. At about 11 o'clock another force appeared, coming down in sections from the direction of Passchendaele, crossed the railway, and settled

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40th Battalion, a pillbox from which shots had previously been received was visited by C.S.M. H. Boden (Myrtle Bank, Tas.) and Sgt. S. J. Barrett (Beaconsfield, Tas.). As they approached, an officer tried to escape but was shot. After another shot at someone who appeared at the loop-hole, a white rag was waved there, and a battalion commander (probably of a rear battalion of the 79th I.R.) and 40 men were captured. Field wireless sets, a listening set, and valuable maps and orders were among the general booty. Two German carrier-pigeons were captured by the 6th Brigade. The sense of humour of their captors prevailed over their appetites, one pigeon being released with the message "Deutschland uber Alles. Hal hal We don't think."

<sup>101</sup> In the afternoon, in response to requests from the 7th Battalion, which was suffering from enfilade, the 6th Brigade bombarded the nearest German post with Stokes mortars and then sent out a party to occupy it. This party saw the Germans limping away, carrying their wounded, but the 24th found the post commanded by the enemy and withdrew from it. As its tenure would necessitate the capture of other posts, Brig-Gen. Paton, after reconnoitring the position himself, decided to suppress any Germans there with trench-mortars. The enemy who reoccupied it, however, continued to harass the 7th.

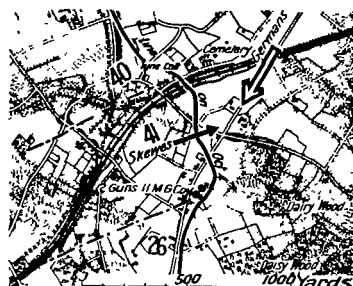
<sup>102</sup> Some of the 41st at one time went 200 yards beyond the objective, in order to obtain a better view, causing thereby much anxiety to General Monash, who feared that the barrage would drop on them; but the forward troops were heavily sniped at, and came back.

<sup>103</sup> Capt. P. F. Calow, M.C.; 41st Bn. Schoolmaster; of Sandgate, Q'land, and Armidale, N.S.W.; b. London, 18 Sept., 1884.

into old trenches 200 yards from the 41st. The 41st fired at them; Calow and all other officers of the centre company having been wounded, Lieutenant Skewes<sup>104</sup> of the support company with two platoons had gone forward and taken charge.<sup>105</sup> The Germans in front began to snipe sharply.

It was getting too hot (said a member of Skewes's company afterwards), so Skewes said, "Oh b—— it, we'll go out and stop this." When they got out in shell-holes about 50 yards away (from the Germans), Skewes pulled out his revolver and said, "Damn it, we'll give it a go—get ready to charge." Then he gave the word, and they got out, all shouting for all they were worth, and the Germans ran.

After following them with shots fired from the hip, the Queenslanders returned, but Lieutenant Butler<sup>106</sup> noticed that Skewes was absent. Butler went out and found him dead, and was himself wounded in getting his leader's body into a shell-hole.



By 11 o'clock the reports of the contact airmen assisting both I and II Anzac had reached corps headquarters. The airmen had picked up the infantry's flares all along the Anzac final objective except at Daisy Wood, where the flares were a little short of the objective, and near the railway, where they were well ahead of it. The news from other parts of the battlefield was almost equally good, even to the northern extremity of the attack, where the 29th Division had taken its objective to the west of Poelcappelle. It was certain that a great success had been achieved, and, like their troops, most of the corps commanders felt that, while the enemy was reeling from this shock, there must occur some passing opportunity of pressing him further. At noon Lieutenant-General Morland,<sup>107</sup> commanding the X Corps, telegraphed to the

<sup>104</sup> Lieut. A. W. Skewes, 41st Bn. Miner; of Charters Towers, Q'land; b. Charters Towers, 13 Nov., 1891. Killed in action, 4 Oct., 1917.

<sup>105</sup> Skewes also sent to Captain Skinner of the 44th, behind him, for reinforcements. Skinner sent up a platoon, together with some ammunition. Skewes kept the ammunition, but sent back the platoon.

<sup>106</sup> Lieut. C. H. Butler, M.C.; 41st Bn. Station overseer; of Barcaldine and Ilfracombe, Q'land; b. Kilcoy, Q'land, 7 Feb., 1892.

<sup>107</sup> General Sir T. L. N. Morland, K.C.B., K.C.M.G., D.S.O., p.s.c. Commanded 5th Divn., 1914/15; X Corps, 1915/18; XIII Corps, 1918/19. Officer of British Regular Army; of Farnborough, Hants, Eng.; b. 9 Aug., 1865. Died 21 May, 1925.

commander of the 7th Division that he was anxious to exploit success northwards—presumably by an advance from the In de Ster promontory against the Germans opposite I Anzac. General Godley of II Anzac, believing the enemy to be sufficiently demoralised,<sup>108</sup> favoured a thrust along the heights by the railway, and about 11 o'clock General Plumer gave consideration to a plan by which I Anzac would take over the 41st Battalion's front south of the railway and advance eastwards in co-operation with the right of II Anzac. General Monash, being consulted, agreed that, although his two leading battalions had suffered severely, he might, by swinging up his right, secure a better jumping-off line for the next attack. Preparations were forthwith made.<sup>109</sup> But Plumer, visiting Birdwood, found him to be strongly against the project. The commander of the 7th Division also opposed the proposal for a thrust from the northern side of the In de Ster promontory, being not quite sure of the success of the 21st Division on the southern side. At 2 o'clock Plumer abandoned the notion of exploiting success. The New Zealand Division, however, was ordered to co-operate at 5.10 with an attempt to be made by the right of the Fifth Army to secure a better jumping-off line.<sup>110</sup>

In contrast to all recent experiences, on this occasion no counter-attack whatever appeared against the Fifth Army, but the evidence of efforts to counter-attack at Broodseinde was continuous. Owing to the fire of the forward machine-guns, the Germans could assemble only at two points, the dead ground near the railway and Daisy Wood. At 2 p.m., a force was seen approaching from Passchendaele, and shortly afterwards another marched along the near side of the Keiberg. Of some unit which came over the Keiberg, and was seen to be directed towards Daisy Wood, an officer of the 26th stated:

Our shells were falling into this infantry all the time. The troops seemed very windy and not at all keen—every shell would make them

<sup>108</sup> General Monash reported at 11.39 that his leading battalions had lost "rather heavily"; and at 2.22 that all reports showed that the fighting had been severe; and at 2.59 that Lieut. C. H. Cane (Hobart) of the 40th Battalion had "captured 31 prisoners single-handed from one blockhouse without firing a shot." But General Godley's impression was formed before this news arrived. The capture of prisoners had been abnormally great.

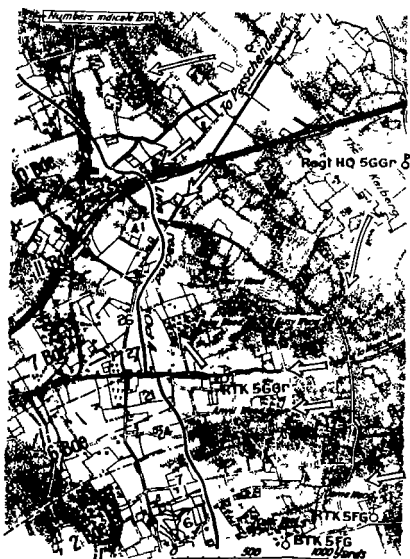
<sup>109</sup> Monash warned General McNicoll (10th Bde.) that he might be required to undertake this, using two battalions from the 9th Bde, then in reserve. The 9th was warned to hold these ready.

<sup>110</sup> The line to be secured was Adler Farm—Inch House—Oxford House—Beek House



scatter. There were mounted men with these—five or six. Every now and then a part of the infantry would break away. The mounted men would round them up, much as you round up stock.<sup>111</sup> There were Germans at the same time also moving down from a pillbox on the Moorslede road to dead ground behind Daisy Wood. The infantry called down the artillery on to these as they were clearly reinforcing Daisy Wood. . . . When, between 3.30 and 4 p.m., the S.O.S. was put up in front of Daisy Wood, the barrage was very solid and quick. The machine-gun barrage was always first in; the bullets could be seen playing on one spot just N.E. of Daisy Wood where it was marshy, and the spray was being flung up. . . .

Australian artillery observers stationing themselves on Broodseinde Ridge had a magnificent view of these German efforts. Lieutenant Linsley<sup>112</sup> by pigeon message directed fire upon the centre of German activity on the Moorslede road, Lieutenant Clark<sup>113</sup> upon another at "Dame Wood."<sup>114</sup> The German force from Passchendaele was dispersed largely by the keenness of trench-mortar officers. Opposite the 41st Battalion German officers could be seen trying to line out their men behind the cemetery hedge, north of the railway. At 3 p.m., the barrage was called down on them; but, in addition, Lieutenant Couchman<sup>115</sup> brought one of his guns to the front line, and whenever sufficient



<sup>111</sup> For the sake of clearness, the order of sentences has been altered.

<sup>112</sup> Lieut. G. Linsley, M.C.; 10th A.F.A. Bde. Station bookkeeper; of Waverley, N.S.W.; b. Kempsey, N.S.W., 22 Dec., 1890. Died of wounds, 7 April, 1918.

<sup>113</sup> Lieut. M. C. Clark, M.C.; 13th A.F.A. Bde. Farm hand; of Talgai, Q'land; b. Talgai, 31 Dec., 1891.

<sup>114</sup> All day such directions continued, often sent by Lucas lamp. Several forward observation and liaison officers lost their lives. These included Capt. J. R. Eddy and W. H. East, and Lieuts. B. Thompson and J. C. Williamson. Other artillery officers killed were Lieuts. R. A. Bennet, W. J. McMullin, and T. E. Muchmore. (Eddy belonged to South Yarra, Vic; East to Rochester, Vic; Thompson to Wagga Wagga, N.S.W.; Williamson to Lismore, Vic.; Bennet to Korumburra, Vic; McMullin to Scone, N.S.W.; Muchmore to Adelaide.)

<sup>115</sup> Capt. C. W. Couchman, M.C.; 11th L.T.M. Bty. Civil servant; of Perth, W. Aust.; b. Toowoomba, Q'land, 28 May, 1871. Died 24 Aug., 1935.

Germans assembled he let fly, scattering the enemy. Lieutenant Howie<sup>116</sup> turned another Stokes gun upon concentrations in "Dairy Wood" (150 yards north of Daisy Wood). By next day the cemetery had been abandoned. The last effort seen was a movement late in the afternoon towards the New Zealanders, but it could not even approach them.

The German counter-attack had indeed been concentrated against Broodseinde to an extent which the British command did not realise or the German command intend. The reserves of the front-line regiments had come forward just as the Australians launched the second phase of the attack.<sup>117</sup> On the southern flank the 93rd R.I.R., endeavouring to regain its position on the In de Ster plateau, was driven back farther still. Opposite the 1st Australian Division the reserves of the 5th Foot Guard (the II/5th Foot Guard and the III/211th R.I.R., both from the artillery protection line), crossing the valley under machine-gun fire from In de Ster, found numbers of troops retiring through them and could only line parts of the hedges and woods below the 1st Australian Division's objective. Headquarters of all the forward battalions in this sector withdrew to the rear headquarters in the artillery protection line.<sup>118</sup> Of the northern regiment, the 5th Guard Grenadier, the reserve battalion (II) had already established part of its scattered companies in front of Daisy Wood. The sight of German troops now streaming to the rear over all the slopes to the south<sup>119</sup> caused the headquarters of this battalion, in the sandpit on the Moorslede road, to apprehend that its own troops might be cut off. Part of the reserve battalion of their neighbour, the 5th Foot Guard, and some of the II/211th R.I.R. which came up soon afterwards, were accordingly placed to guard that flank. But the Australians next were seen going past on the north, and this movement started an alarm which largely influenced the subsequent movement of German reserves. The front line of the II/5th Guard Grenadier was ordered to fall back to Daisy Wood,<sup>120</sup> the rest of the II/211th R.I.R. was placed in touch with it, and word of the breakthrough was sent to the regimental commander, Major Freiherr von Schleinitz, at "Eddy Farm" on the Keiberg.

This message said that the British were advancing in the direction of the Keiberg, and, exaggerated by other reports, it ushered in two hours of intense anxiety. Schleinitz, physically a light-weight but a thorough fighter, had at the moment no more reserves. "I was determined, whatever came, to hold my headquarters," he wrote afterwards. "If

<sup>116</sup> Lieut. J. W. Howie, M.C.; 11th L.T.M. Bty. Fuel merchant; of Fortitude Valley, Q'land; b. Dundee, Scotland, 24 March, 1892.

<sup>117</sup> These reserves had been increased by the allotment of a battalion of the 211th R.I.R. to each regiment.

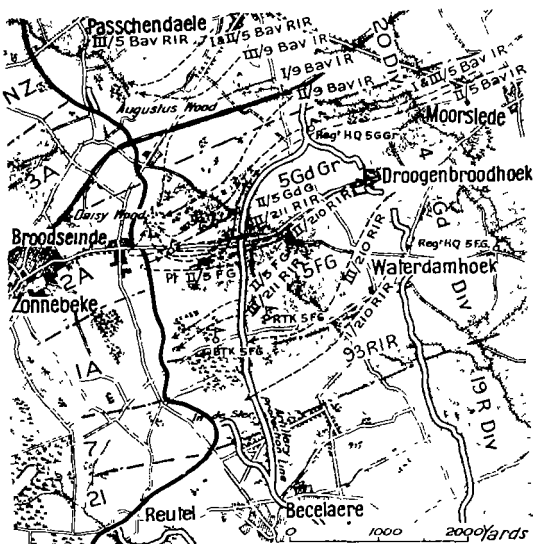
<sup>118</sup> At Dame Wood. This was also the headquarters of Colonel Rave, 212th R.I.R., who that evening was killed by a shell.

<sup>119</sup> A message, captured by the British, of an officer of the 19th Reserve Division said that large numbers of the 93rd R.I.R. were retiring towards Becelaere apparently under orders of an officer, and that nothing could stop them.

<sup>120</sup> About this time Captain Freiherr von Hanstein, commanding the battalion, was wounded, and the command fell to his adjutant, Lieutenant Heinrich von Hennig. While this officer was placing in position the II/211th R.I.R., he saw the front line running back to Daisy Wood. Full of indignation, he hurried across to stop these men, when a figure just as indignant emerged from a shell-hole and called "Leave my men alone—they're perfectly right! I've ordered them to the western edge of the wood, as the English are advancing." It was his brother, Lieut. Detlef von Hennig, to whose company they belonged.

that fell, the road to the east lay open to the enemy. Then—it was about 11.15 a.m.—a Bavarian infantryman came up to me. He had been sent to find out the situation for his regimental commander. I asked, 'Where is the regiment? How far from here?' It was only 1½–2 kilometres east of the regimental headquarters, though in the sector of the neighbouring division. It was the 5th Bavarian I.R. Under whose command it was, I did not know. My decision was made at once." Major von Schleinitz sent to the commander of this regiment an order to attack, and directions, as if the regiment had been placed under his own command. "The C.O.," he continues, "was a lieutenant-colonel. I was only a major. . . . Would he act upon my operation order? . . . . There passed about two hours with much depressing news from the front. . . . The enemy needed only to march forward and he would have been able to push through." But the Bavarian regiment apparently acted on his order. About 1.30 p.m. came a message from Lieutenant von Hennig, on the right of the sector: "Hurrah, reinforcements!" Nothing more, but I knew enough. . . . The front was closed again, and the situation had been saved."

Actually, a small reinforcement had come up just before. The counter-attack division (45th Reserve) still had available the regiment whose attack had been defeated on October 1, the 210th R.I.R. This was given to the 4th Guard Division, which, at 11.25, sent a battalion to reinforce each sector. But these troops were thoroughly exhausted and, although between 1 and 2 p.m. part of the allotted battalion got through to the front of the 5th Guard Grenadier, its commander represented that it was unfit to attack, and it was therefore sent back to the artillery-protection line where its two sister battalions also were retained. The 5th Bavarian I.R., annexed by Major von Schleinitz, was part of the 4th Bavarian Division, which had been ordered up to the area between Passchendaele and Moorslede, apparently as counter-attack troops for the 20th Division. At 11.25, on receipt of the urgent call from the 5th Guard Grenadier, it was directed to Eddy Farm (Kapellenhof) on the Keiberg, which was said to be the only convenient point for its passage through the wire of the Flanders II Line. It advanced at once with the I Battalion, followed



Route of German counter-attacking troops, Oct. 4, showing the concentration about Daisy Wood.

by the III. From the Keiberg Schleinitz directed it straight to Broodseinde. Both battalions reached the forward headquarters at the gravel pit with slight loss, but at that stage they received strong machine-gun fire, which drove them to shelter in Daisy Wood with the remnant of the 5th Guard Grenadier.

Meanwhile the other two regiments of the 4th Bavarian Division were to attack astride and north of the railway. The 9th Bavarian I.R. was at 12.5 directed from the north-east against Broodseinde.<sup>121</sup> At 12.30 its II Battalion advanced south of the railway, but, passing over the Keiberg, it came, first into a thick barrage and then into machine-gun fire which broke it up. Much scattered, it managed to reach the remnants of the 4th Guard Division at Daisy Wood and farther south. The I Battalion, which was to attack north of the railway, advanced at 1.45,<sup>122</sup> but it was first hampered in crossing the wire of the Flandern II Line, then came under fire at the cutting through the Keiberg, and finally received from its right machine-gun fire so deadly that it also was driven south to Daisy Wood. (These evidently were the troops which tried to assemble in front of the 41st Battalion at 2.30.) The III Battalion advanced down the crest from Passchendaele on the right of the other two, but received such fire from Australian machine-guns on the crest that it swerved to its right into the valley in front of the Gravenstafel spur, where it found itself mixed with the third regiment of the division, the 5th Bavarian R.I.R., which had attempted to advance against the New Zealanders.<sup>123</sup>

At 3 o'clock, on further alarm of a break-through towards the Keiberg, the last battalion of this Bavarian division, the II/5th Bav. I.R., was ordered to attack from Eddy Farm towards Broodseinde cross-roads. This direction took it also straight to Daisy Wood, where it found both its sister battalions, together with the 9th Bav. I.R. and the remainder of the 5th Guard Grenadier,<sup>124</sup> the whole collection being pounded by the British artillery. According to its regimental history, the II/5th Bav. I.R. began to advance from there, apparently faced by only a few "English" infantry and machine-gunners, and these were already dropping back when the German barrage fell upon the battalion and stopped the attack. (The events described are obviously those which occurred about 3.30 p.m., when the 26th Australian Battalion fired the S.O.S. The Australian line, however, did not retire.)

Opposite the In de Ster plateau reserves were borrowed from the Wytschaete Corps,<sup>125</sup> but they could not recapture this important height.

On the British side the attempt by the Fifth Army to exploit success was made by the XVIII Corps at 5.10. The German resistance had by then stiffened, rain was falling, the barrage was lost, and the effort failed. On the I Anzac front

<sup>121</sup> The three field-batteries attached to the three regiments took position at different points on the Keiberg, and supported the advance by direct fire. They suffered many casualties.

<sup>122</sup> It was wrongly held back by the 79th I.R. (20th Division).

<sup>123</sup> One battalion of the 5th Bav. R.I.R. was sent round the north of Passchendaele along the Meetcheele-Bellevue spur. The 3rd Australian Division sniped vigorously into its flank.

<sup>124</sup> The History of the 5th Guard Grenadier states that its front was held by parts of the I/9 Bav. I.R., the II/5 Bav. I.R., II/9 Bav. I.R., the remainder of II/5 Gd. Gren., a few men of the II/211 R.I.R., the I/5 Bav. I.R., and parts of the III/5 Bav. I.R. Parts of the III/5 Bav. I.R. were also in reserve.

<sup>125</sup> First the 93rd I.R. (8th Divn.), and then the 94th R.I.R. (22nd Res. Divn.).

the Germans laid down a precautionary bombardment from 5.30 to 6.30, but no movement of infantry occurred. At 10 p.m. an S.O.S. signal brought down the British barrage.<sup>128</sup> The 44th Battalion was warned to have men ready to assist the 41st, but the 41st did not need them. The German counter-attacks had not necessitated the bringing forward of a single unit, and at midnight even one of the two companies of the 27th that had come forward in the morning was withdrawn.

An overwhelming blow had been struck, and both sides knew it. The objective was the most important yet attacked by the Second and Fifth Armies, and they had again done almost exactly what they had planned to do.<sup>127</sup> The recent German decision to hold the front line in greater strength had merely resulted in the destruction of the troops placed there. The German staffs waiting on Broodseinde Ridge for news of the success of their own enterprise at Zonnebeke had found their attack-troops swept away, and the wave engulfing themselves. The subsequent throwing of two counter-attack divisions against the Anzac front failed to regain an inch of ground.<sup>128</sup> The Anzac troops, despite the intense fire laid on them before the start, had never fought better.

This was the third blow struck at Ypres in fifteen days with complete success. It drove the Germans from one of the most important positions on the Western Front; notwithstanding their full knowledge that it was coming, they were completely powerless to withstand it. As regards merely the extent of the front and the forces engaged, it was no greater operation than Messines, which also was comparable to it in the cleanness of the result. But, coming on top of the achievements of September 20th and 26th, its success was of

<sup>126</sup> To avoid waste of ammunition, S.O.S. barrages were now limited to 15 minutes, unless the signal was repeated.

<sup>127</sup> The exceptions were of no importance in their influence on the general result. They comprised a slight falling short on a sector of the XVIII Corps at "Burns House" and the neighbouring cemetery; others, on the X Corps front, at Reutel and Polderhoek, and that of the 2nd Australian Division at Daisy Wood.

and Powderhoek, and that of the Australian 15th Reserve, 4th Bavarian and 23d Reserve Divisions, "advancing from the direction of the Keiberg succeeded, after heavy fighting, the issue of which remained long uncertain, in finally driving the enemy back on Broodseinde" was based on the erroneous belief that the British had penetrated, and intended to penetrate, to the Keiberg. Far from this being attempted, General Monash spoke strongly to Brig-Gen. Cannan because part of the 41st was suspected of being at Keerselaarhoek cemetery, 200 yards ahead of its objective.

an entirely different order. "The black day of October 4th," the German Official History calls it.<sup>129</sup> Ludendorff says that the battle "was extraordinarily severe, and again we only came through it with enormous losses." No army could continue to withstand such blows. These clean victories on comparatively wide fronts were in sharp contrast with the uneven successes of the First Somme. It is true that the British loss also, at least in the two Anzac Corps, was severe.<sup>130</sup> The Germans had fought hard; the spirit of many of their divisions was still stubborn. But the German command had this day barely been able to supply the reserves required, and the reserves when thrown in had been far less effective than their commanders realised. One or two more such strokes, and, with proper provision beforehand, even "exploitation"

<sup>129</sup> The history of the 5th Foot Guard Regiment describes it as "the hardest day yet experienced by the regiment in the war."

<sup>130</sup> The Australian losses were.

*1st Australian Division (total loss, 2,448).*

1st Infantry Brigade.			2nd Infantry Brigade.			3rd Infantry Brigade.		
Off. O.R.			Off. O.R.			Off. O.R.		
1st Bn.	..	13 267	5th Bn.	..	7 166	9th Bn.	..	6 100
2nd Bn.	..	10 144	6th Bn.	..	14 243	10th Bn.	..	4 45
3rd Bn.	..	12 225	7th Bn.	..	14 239	11th Bn.	..	3 56
4th Bn.	..	5 190	8th Bn.	..	14 254	12th Bn.	..	4 67
1st M.G. Coy.	2	26	2nd M.G. Coy.	4	18	3rd M.G. Coy.	—	19
1st L.T.M. Bty.	—	20	2nd L.T.M. Bty.	—	14	3rd L.T.M. Bty.	—	2
		<u>42 872</u>			<u>53 934</u>			<u>17 289</u>
Artillery	..	3 71	21st M.G. Coy.	—	21	Pioneers	..	2 61
Engineers	..	5 46				Fld. Amb.	..	2 30

*2nd Australian Division (total loss, 2,174).*

5th Infantry Brigade.			6th Infantry Brigade.			7th Infantry Brigade.		
Off. O.R.			Off. O.R.			Off. O.R.		
17th Bn.	..	— 28	21st Bn.	..	13 332	25th Bn.	..	12 239
18th Bn.	..	3 93	22nd Bn.	..	6 183	26th Bn.	..	9 311
19th Bn.	..	3 52	23rd Bn.	..	3 101	27th Bn.	..	6 143
20th Bn.	..	1 55	24th Bn.	..	10 254	28th Bn.	..	8 95
5th M.G. Coy.	2	24	6th M.G. Coy.	3	18	7th M.G. Coy.	3	28
5th L.T.M. Bty.	—	2	6th L.T.M. Bty.	2	17	7th L.T.M. Bty.	—	4
		<u>9 254</u>			<u>37 905</u>			<u>38 820</u>
Artillery	..	7 15	Signal Coy.	..	— 15	Pioneers	..	— 21
Engineers	..	— 21	22nd M.G. Coy.	—	13	Fld. Amb.	..	1 18

*3rd Australian Division (loss, 1810).*

10th Infantry Brigade.			11th Infantry Brigade.		
Off. O.R.			Off. O.R.		
37th Bn.	..	7 226	41st Bn.	..	9 248
38th Bn.	..	2 183	42nd Bn.	..	13 210
39th Bn.	..	8 202	43rd Bn.	..	6 178
40th Bn.	..	7 243	44th Bn.	..	12 193
10th M.G. Coy.	—	26	11th M.G. Coy.	1	18
10th L.T.M. Bty.	1	9	11th L.T.M. Bty.	—	8
		<u>25 889</u>			<u>41 855</u>

might be attempted with confidence. The success of those strokes could be made a certainty, provided good weather continued. Granted this condition, there was little doubt that the commanders could at last powerfully affect, if not decide, the issue of the war.

It was this fact that differentiated the Battle of Broodseinde from all previous "victories" in which the Australians had participated in France, and even from the Battle of Arras, in which the first stroke was perhaps more stunning but subsequent success was never really on the horizon. It is true that, as before, the British and French people, and even their Governments, recognised only another of the "victories" that they had heard shouted so often. Sir Henry Wilson, now in London promoting a proposal of his own,<sup>131</sup> noted on October 5th, "Lloyd George has no illusions about Haig's 'victory' of yesterday." Yet, among many well-informed observers at the front—such, for example, as the British war-correspondents, who were, in fact, keenly sensitive to the failures of the past—there was a definite feeling that this battle was the most complete success so far won by the British Army in France.<sup>132</sup> The fact that the condition necessary to the consummation of the step-by-step campaign—good weather—was improbable, makes no difference to the import of the Battle of Broodseinde. For the first time in years, at noon on October 4th on the heights east of Ypres, British troops on the Western Front stood face to face with the possibility of decisive success.

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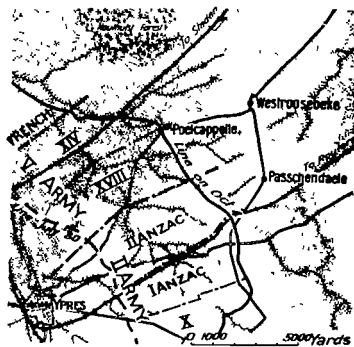
<sup>131</sup> The concentration of troops in Palestine during the winter months to knock Turkey out of the war.

<sup>132</sup> General Plumer is said to have called it "the greatest victory since the Marne"

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE PLAN BREAKS DOWN. PASSCHENDAELE I— OCTOBER 9TH

THE next move, the capture of Passchendaele, was to be made in two steps, the first—so far as the Second Army was concerned—a short preparatory advance projected for October 10th, to be followed by a much deeper advance on the 13th in which Passchendaele would be captured by II Anzac, using the 3rd Australian and the New Zealand Divisions. The Fifth Army would join in both these attacks and might assault Westroosebeke on October 14th, the Second Army swinging up its left to assist. Westroosebeke gained, the descent towards Roulers could begin. Although no certain programme could be adopted, these steps were definitely in view. At Haig's conference with Gough and Plumer on the afternoon of the Polygon Wood fight, Gough urged that, after the next fight, it would be necessary for the French to support the Fifth Army's left by advancing across the corner of Houthulst Forest. Haig promised to arrange for the French to participate on October 10th.



On September 28th at a further conference Haig surprised the army commanders by announcing that the time was approaching for a change of method. Under the rapid series of blows lately delivered, he said, the German forces were being used up and demoralisation was increasing.

The moment would probably shortly arrive at which we could do more than gain a definite and limited line. We must be prepared to exploit our successful attack and so achieve more decisive results.<sup>1</sup>

The operations of October 4th would complete a definite stage of the offensive, and those of October 10th, being on a

<sup>1</sup> The quotation is from the official record of the conference.



very wide front, would probably furnish an opportunity for exploitation. The Director-General of Transportation must push ahead the chief roads and railways, and the army commanders must have their plans made, and reserves, with tanks and detachments of artillery and cavalry, ready for action either to the east, towards Moorslede, or northwards, at the back of the ridge.

Both Gough and Plumer thought that Haig was over-estimating the deterioration of the enemy, and each sent him a written opinion of which the effect was that he was proceeding too fast. Gough agreed, however, that by October 10th it might be possible to increase the speed and depth of the blows; also, the infantry would then be clear of the worst of the mud. But the artillery could only get through it as roads and light railways were pushed on; the two steps in which it was proposed to reach and take Westroosebeke must be carefully prepared. Then, probably, after three powerful blows in six days, the Cavalry Corps might be used with success, although the main force might still have to wait until the railways arrived at the ridge.

Haig's reliance on the deterioration of the enemy's spirit undoubtedly led him, later, to unfortunate decisions, but in the measures inaugurated on October 2nd he envisaged little more than the prospect described by Gough.<sup>2</sup> He had in view much the same situation that was actually to occur in the Battle of Broodseinde. He never forgot how, on the 31st of October, 1914, in the First Battle of Ypres, when the exhausted British could not have withstood further pressure, the Germans failed to push forward. Such a chance must not be missed by the British. If another clean victory on October 10th brought them to the outskirts of Passchendaele, there was every probability that a well-prepared advance an hour or two later might take the place at no undue cost.<sup>3</sup> If the clearing of the coast was still in view, the prospect of such a gain of ground was not to be forgone, especially with winter rapidly approaching. The repercussions of even a local break-through at that stage might have been far-reaching. And, although doubtless there was little prospect of cavalry

<sup>2</sup> He noted this in the margin of Gough's memorandum.

<sup>3</sup> A subsequent intelligence summary of II Anzac said of the situation on Oct. 4: "There can be little doubt that, if it had been in accordance with the wishes of the Higher Command, we could have captured Passchendaele this day with slight opposition."

being effectively employed on October 10th, Haig might justly have been criticised if he had continued his series of strokes while totally unprepared for their exploitation.

He insisted on the army commanders making such plans, and called a conference on October 2nd to discuss them. Plumer and Gough then proposed that exploitation should be undertaken, first, by the reserve brigades of the divisions which attacked on October 10th,<sup>4</sup> and the corps cavalry, supported by batteries previously advanced in readiness. If opportunity arose, the local commanders would send these troops on to Passchendaele or even beyond. If resistance proved to be crumbling, the thrust would be taken up next morning by reserve divisions and cavalry divisions.<sup>5</sup> On October 2nd Haig approved of these plans, and ordered that on the evening of October 10th two cavalry divisions should be within a day's march of the battle-front, with the rest of the Cavalry Corps (less one division) ready to follow. On the same day he decided, in view of the sustained success of the recent operations, to continue the effort at Ypres as long as possible by employing there "all necessary and available" forces "as long as the weather conditions permit." This would mean the abandonment, for the present at least, of the operations of the Fourth Army on the coast and the First Army near Lens. Six British divisions would be brought up to the Fifth Army between October 4th and 20th, and the Canadian Corps (four divisions) to the Second Army about October 20th.

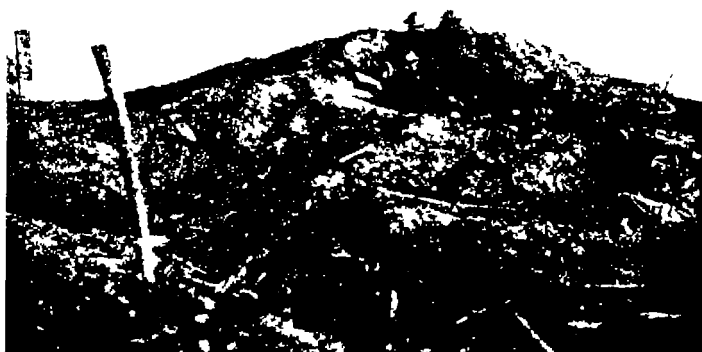
How prudent were Haig's precautions was shown by the occurrences of October 4th, and these made a deep impression not only on him but on Plumer and Harington. That evening the chief of the intelligence staff<sup>6</sup> informed Haig:

I am . . . of opinion that, at the present moment, there is no formed division (of enemy reserves, beyond those on that morning's map) within immediate reach of the battlefront. I do not think that any formed division can reach the battlefront until early morning on the 6th October.

<sup>4</sup> I Anzac, owing to the exhaustion of its line divisions, which were not relieved after Oct. 4, had to allot part of its reserve division.

<sup>5</sup> The Director-General of Transportation said that he could bring up one inf. division for each army within seven hours of the order being given, or within three or four hours if previous warning was given.

<sup>6</sup> Brig.-Gen. J. Charteris, C.M.G., D.S.O., p.s.c. G.S.O. (2), First Army, 1914-15; B.G.G.S. (Intell.), G.H.Q., 1916/17; Deputy Director-General of Transportation, G.H.Q., 1918. Officer of British Regular Army; of Glasgow, Scotland; b. Glasgow, 8 Jan., 1877.



50 OBSERVERS ON THE SAND HUMMOCK ON BROODSEINDE RIDGE,  
5TH OCTOBER, 1917

*Aust War Memorial Official Photo No E4516*



51. GERMANS CAPTURED ON OCTOBER 4TH AT BROODSEINDE RIDGE

*Aust War Memorial Official Photo No I7877*

*To face p 88o*



52. A HOWITZER BOGGED IN THE HANNEBEEK VALLEY, 4TH OCTOBER, 1917  
Men of the 2nd Pioneer Battalion are helping to dig it out. In the background is a party carrying duckboards.

The units in the German line were mixed in a manner that suggested great confusion. It was afterwards ascertained that fresh divisions came into the line opposite I and II Anzac on October 5th; before the next battle, the whole of the battered front was held by fresh troops, and an extra division had been inserted opposite the In de Ster plateau.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless it is now known that an acute shortage was in prospect.

Ludendorff, who was providing nine divisions against Italy and was expecting a French limited attack in Champagne, was doubtful whether he would be able to reinforce the Flanders front, and—though this was unknown to the British until long afterwards—was ordering a direct reversal of the recently adopted method of defence. He insisted that Crown Prince Rupprecht “should not allow our troops to be shattered by enemy fire, and should give way before it.” The forward area was now to be held with a few posts; the main line of resistance would be sited perhaps half-a-mile farther back. The German artillery would register it,<sup>8</sup> and, when the British attacked in force, the weak German posts would quickly fall back, and, on their firing signals, the artillery would lay down its barrage across the path of the attack. The British would thus no longer be able to escape the German barrage. Ludendorff also insisted on more counter-battery fire.

Crown Prince Rupprecht would have liked to strike dead the British offensive by a German counter-thrust through its flank in the direction of Kemmel, but he was entirely without the means for this. In the end he was forced to contemplate a series of voluntary withdrawals, despite the risk of uncovering the Belgian coast. “If, as must be expected, the French attack the Seventh and Third Armies at the same time as the launching of an English attack,” he noted on October 9, “O.H.L. will no longer be in a position to help us by bringing up fresh forces.” “Our troops, on the chief fighting front in Flanders,” he wrote on the 11th, “are in a fair degree of confusion. The disentangling of formations is in progress. . . . Most troublesome is the fact that our fighting force becomes all the time of poorer quality, and that every means that we thought out is ineffective as a counter to the overpowering superiority of the enemy’s artillery. As it is a matter, for us, of fighting to gain time, nothing else remains except by repeated withdrawal to force the enemy to a fresh time-consuming advance of his artillery.”

Let the student looking at the prospect as it appeared at noon on October 4th ask himself, “In view of the results of three step-by-step blows, what will be the result of three more in the next fortnight?” In spite of all the critics, if the weather made these methods possible, was Haig’s strategic design beyond chance of attainment?

<sup>7</sup> To compensate for the lengthening of the line.

<sup>8</sup> During registration their shots would fall far behind their front line, this action was to be cloaked by a covering bombardment.

But, on the very day on which this prospect opened, the weather broke. Half-an-hour after noon light rain began to fall, and the sky gave no promise of its ceasing. The crossing of the valleys beyond the end of the duckboard tracks immediately became a matter of immense labour. The strain on all carrying and digging parties was trebled; in the 3rd Division's sector, where the stretchers-bearers' "carry" was long, the duckboards short, and a large proportion of the trained bearers had been taken for the corps dressing station,<sup>9</sup> the system of medical evacuation at once broke down. The cramped pillboxes used as aid posts overflowed with serious cases, and the mudfield outside became crowded with badly wounded men, who had to lie all night without shelter from the shelling or from the rain. In I Anzac the new circuit road to Westhoek was to be used that day by horse ambulances, and the old circuit, to Bellewaarde, by motor ambulances.<sup>10</sup> But the ambulance cars skidded off the greasy planks into the bog. Even one of the horse ambulances, full of wounded, slipped from the road and overturned; by the afternoon two, but only two, were placed on the forward circuit. Major Hunt,<sup>11</sup> in charge of the forward relay at Westhoek, was killed when leading up his bearers. They had to carry as far back as Birr Cross-road and worked themselves to exhaustion, but the wounded were not clear by dusk. A number had to be placed in pillboxes for the night and made as comfortable as possible, and by special measures these were cleared at dawn.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> The 9th Field Ambulance bearers were thus taken. A number of infantry were supplied in their place, but lacked physique and training, and proved difficult to control. During the whole day only four field-ambulance bearers reached the aid post of the 38th and 40th Battalions at Levi Cottages. The regimental bearers, forced to carry to the rear as well as in the forward area, could not clear the wounded. Fortunately the actual collection of wounded lying out after this fight was much assisted by an order issued by the German Ypres Group. "Previous experience," it said, "shows that the English respect the Red Cross flag. It is therefore to be used as much as possible in the pauses in the fight, so as to clear the wounded."

<sup>10</sup> See sketches on pp. 793 and 903.

<sup>11</sup> Major G. M. Hunt, M.C.; A.A.M.C. Medical practitioner; of Sydney and Candelo, N.S.W.; b. North Sydney, 13 Oct., 1889. Killed in action, 4 Oct., 1917. (He had already been wounded.)

<sup>12</sup> German prisoners had helped in the morning of the 4th, but the officers on the spot had to be stopped from sending them forward again for a second carry, as this interfered with their examination and also might have brought retaliatory measures. The bearers of the 1st and 2nd Divisions were assisted by the 13th Field Ambulance, the tunnellers, and, later, the 15th Field Ambulance. Before the battle the 5th Division had also been ordered to provide 200 men as a reserve of stretcher-bearers, and the 3rd Brigade supplied 100. With this help, by 8 a.m. on the 5th the wounded were cleared. In I Anzac the evacuation was through Westhoek, which was a dépôt

More serious for the continuance of the operations were the difficulties in getting forward the artillery. I Anzac had pushed its roads and railways far beyond any others, but it had been unable before October 4th to provide a third planked road circuit like those undertaken before September 20th and 26th. Forward of Westhoek it had to place chief reliance upon the single road from Westhoek to Zonnebeke, in which the crowded shell-holes had been filled in with earth. This track (known as "Smith's Road"<sup>13</sup>) would have carried traffic well enough in dry weather, but when, shortly after noon on October 4th, the first echelon of guns was ordered to advance by it to Anzac and Tokio Spurs, even in the slight rain it gave way beneath them. As the rain went on, mules and pack-horses, endlessly ploughing their way along the same tracks, as well as on the special mule-tracks, quickly rendered them almost impassable.

The rain continued, as a drizzle throughout October 5th, in constant showers on the 6th, and in bitter, drenching squalls on the 7th. On the 8th, until 4 p.m. there was a strong, drying wind, but at that hour the rain became torrential. The meteorological experts said that no improvement was to be hoped for; a tempest 1,000 miles west of Ireland was approaching at the rate of forty miles an hour.

In these circumstances Haig made the most questioned decision of his career. To the average soldier it appeared that the chance of strategic success in 1917 had probably gone.

I believe that if the weather had only held over another two or three weeks (wrote a subaltern<sup>14</sup> on October 8) we would have had Fritz well on the run in Flanders, and would have had numerous opportunities of following him up and further knocking him about with our cavalry. Now I fear that it must be a wash-out for the year—tough luck, but we've got to take things as they are and keep plugging away. . . .

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of stores and a relay station for bearers, and, if possible, was to become a loading station and advanced dressing station. It was eventually used as an advanced dressing station, although the shelter was slight and a number of casualties occurred, Captain J. Davie being among those who lost their lives, and Majors T. J. Frizell and N. E. B. Kirkwood being wounded. The principal advanced dressing station was at the Menin Road, stretcher cases being dealt with (under Lieut.-Colonel E. T. Brennan, 1st Field Ambulance) on the north side of the road, and the walking wounded on the south side (under Lieut.-Colonel A. H. Moseley, 6th Field Ambulance). From here 59 lorries carried 1,250 wounded to Remy Siding, and 230 went by train. Another 700 were evacuated by lorry and train from the auxiliary dressing station at No. 10 Bridge in Ypres. (Davie belonged to Jerilderie, N.S.W.; Frizell, who died of his wounds on Dec. 2, to Strathfield, N.S.W.; Kirkwood to Wollongong, N.S.W.; Brennan to Beechworth, Vic.; Moseley to Annandale, N.S.W.)

<sup>13</sup> See sketch on p. 903.

<sup>14</sup> Lieut. C. F. Sharland, 40th Bn. Bank clerk; of Hobart; b. Westbury, Tas., 23 Oct., 1882. Killed in action, 12th Oct., 1917.

But on October 4th, with a brilliant prospect still open, Haig had decided to hasten the next steps, and strike on October 9th and 12th instead of on the 10th and 13th. He had now to face the question whether those dates should be cancelled, and the attacks postponed until fine weather.<sup>15</sup> To do so meant abandoning his strategic designs for 1917; not to do so, was to forgo the sure method that lately had served him so well. Haig cannot have been unaware that the basic conditions—careful preparation, protection by the artillery, and maintenance of the infantry's freshness—were possibly, if not certainly, unobtainable in the mud, especially now that the speed and depth of the strokes were being increased in view of the weakening morale of the Germans. All the commanders would have liked to stop the offensive, but Plumer and Gough were loyal to Haig's conceptions, and he was intensely desirous of crowning his army's immense effort with the strategic success that seemed so near; he clung to the hope of it. For advice as to the practicability of attacking, he looked to the local commanders, but in referring to them on October 7th he expressed his great anxiety "that there should be no postponement unless absolutely necessary."<sup>16</sup> Notes of an address given by General Harington to the war correspondents on the eve of this attack show that the recent successes were proudly attributed by him to the methods pursued by the Second Army, and that, whether the Fifth Army thought differently or not, the Second Army was set upon making the attack. It still hoped that after one or two more strokes the cavalry might be put through, and, though ill-weather was almost certain, considered the attempt worth making. The sandy crest of the ridge, Harington said, was "as dry as a bone."

To some of those who, with tense anxiety, listened to this address, the situation seemed to contain the seeds of a classical tragedy; the brilliance of the Second Army's success appeared to be tempting its leaders to forsake their tried methods.

I believe (noted one who was present) the official attitude is that Passchendaele Ridge is so important that to-morrow's attack is worth making whether it succeeds or fails. . . . I suspect that they are making a great, bloody experiment—a huge gamble. . . . I feel, and most of the correspondents feel, . . . terribly anxious. . . . These major-generals . . . are banking on their knowledge of

<sup>15</sup> The order to prepare for exploitation on Oct. 10 was cancelled on Oct. 7.

<sup>16</sup> At that time there was still hope of finer weather. The corps commanders of the Second Army were to consult with General Plumer at 8 a.m. on Oct. 8, and the decision would be given by 9 o'clock. It had then ceased raining, and a strong drying wind blew, but at 4 p.m., when heavy rain began again, there was still ample time for stopping the attack.



German demoralisation. . . . I thought the principle was to be "hit, hit, hit, *whenever the weather is suitable.*" If so, it is thrown over at the first temptation.

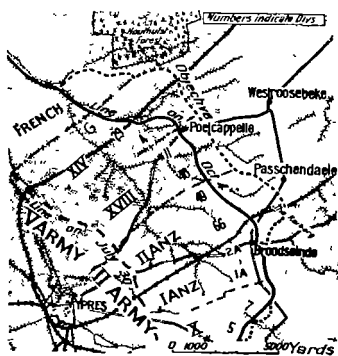
Drenching rain continued until midnight. Birdwood, who knew that his troops were almost exhausted, hoped for postponement; but, as his corps had but a slight task on the flank of II Anzac, whose commander was for attacking, he did not care to protest. Haig decided to let the assault go forward.

So far as the official records show, the offensive of October 9th, delivered on a front of 13,500 yards from south-east of Broodseinde to St. Jansbeek, was

**The attack  
of October 9**

supported by as strong an artillery as the previous strokes. As on July 31st, the Fifth and French armies, attacking on the lower and less vital ground, met with much success. According to reports received during the morning, the Second Army's progress was almost equally good; although part of II Anzac started late, the final objective was reported to have been gained almost everywhere, and at 11.15 a low-flying airman gave confirmation to this. Although comparatively few Australians were engaged, the actual position must be shortly told.

The 66th British Division, the right of II Anzac, had to advance along the ridge, where lay the main objective, while the 49th British Division, the left of II Anzac, seized and advanced along the Bellevue-Meetcheele spur, which joined the ridge just beyond Passchendaele. The two heights were separated by the valley of the Ravebeek, described in a Second Army intelligence summary of October 7th as being "saturated ground. Quite impassable. Should be avoided by all troops at all times." The only Australian division taking part in the main operation was the 2nd, which was to make a flank for the 66th from the railway southwards; but a party of the 1st was to divert attention by raiding "Celtic Wood," down Broodseinde Ridge. For the main operation there were two objectives,



the "red" and "blue" lines, entailing advances of 650 and 600-850 yards respectively. This would bring the 66th Division to the first cottages of Passchendaele, 750 yards short of the church. This division was supposed to be supported by nine brigades of field artillery, but, as will be seen later, the real fell far short of the nominal strength. The artillery arrangements were in general the same as for the previous attack.<sup>17</sup> The barrage would fall when the infantry advanced at 5.20 a.m.,<sup>18</sup> and would finally cease at 10.27.

The 66th was an untried division as to the capacity of whose staff for this operation there was anxiety not only in Australian circles. The relief in which its 199th Brigade took over the 3rd Australian Division's line on the night of October 5th was marked by an almost incredible degree of mismanagement.<sup>19</sup> The divisional staff now took the precaution of bringing up east of Ypres the two brigades for the attack, 197th and 198th, so that, on the night before the attack, they would have only two and a half miles to go to their tapes. Starting at dusk, they would have ten hours for the march, and at half-a-mile an hour it would only take five. But the engineering force of II Anzac had been chiefly concentrated on making roads for the guns; when the 10th and 11th Field Companies of the 3rd Australian Division were turned upon the infantry tracks, they could do little except mark them with tapes, stakes, and lamps, and improve the crossings of the worst swamps. On the night of the approach, drenching rain made these almost impassable, and five hours before zero it became certain that the right brigade (197th) could not reach its jumping-off line in time. The brigade's diary says that all available staff officers were sent out with orders

to push forward all men who were able to move quickly and leave those who were exhausted to come on later. Men struggled up throughout the night but were unable to get right up to the tape line by zero hour.

<sup>17</sup> Except that the preparatory bombardments were now interspersed with periods of silence. In the attack the rate of advance would be practically the same as for Oct. 4. The barrage would lie for 4 minutes 150 yards ahead of the infantry; then advance the first 200 yards at 100 yards in 4 minutes, and the rest of the way to the first objective at 100 in 6, and to the second objective at 100 in 8.

<sup>18</sup> The daylight saving "summer" time had ceased on Oct 7, when the clocks were retarded an hour and the B.E.F. reverted to true time.

<sup>19</sup> Birdwood was so shocked by the particulars which reached his ears that he conceived that the corps and divisional commanders should be frankly informed of them. The sole effect of his representation, however, was to imperil the career of a splendid officer of the division (a brother of the Maxwells of Mouquet Farm and of Messines) who indirectly and unwittingly had been the channel through which Birdwood received the information.

At that hour, 5.20 a.m., Lieutenants Rutledge<sup>20</sup> and King<sup>21</sup> of the 3rd Division's artillery, waiting at the front to join the infantry, could find no sign of them. The commander of the leading battalion also had come on early, and now, thinking that the attack must have been postponed, he went back to his pillbox. Actually, the head of his battalion was then not far away, struggling with conditions which (says the diary of the second battalion in the column, the 2/8th Lancashire Fusiliers)

were almost indescribable. The night was inky, the track led over ground covered with innumerable shell-holes full of mud and water. This march, which would normally take about 1 to 1½ hours to complete, occupied 11½ hours, with the result that the battalion arrived in the front line 20 minutes late.

The battalion commander having been wounded, a company commander, Captain Macpherson,<sup>22</sup> led on these troops as they arrived. An Australian diarist, who a few hours later met a junior subaltern of the division, helmet-less and puttee-less, with head bandaged, stumbling back along the duckboards of the 2nd Australian Division, has set down the description of the fight which this youngster gave him:

Ah doan' know what our brigade was doin' to put us in after a twelve hours' march—twelve hours from beginning to end. We had no duckboards like these—we plugged through the mud. We didn't know where the tapes were, and by the time we arrived there our barrage had gone on half-an-hour. The men were so done they could hardly stand oop an' hold a rifle. We didn't know where our starting position was, but we went on after the barrage. I'm sorry for the Australians,<sup>23</sup> and it was our first stoont too. We're a new division, ye know.

Asked if he saw any Germans, he said,

Ah saw eight or nine and ran at them with my revolver, and they came running in—but we were held up on the third (*sic*) objective.

The Germans' resistance had been feeble. They surrendered in numbers even before this ragged advance, an hour late for the barrage, and on the Passchendaele crest the second objective was eventually reached by a considerable number of the 197th Brigade. But neither the 198th on the left, nor the Australians on the right, were within touch or view. The 198th Brigade and the 49th Division, although their assemblies were nearly complete by zero hour, had

<sup>20</sup> Lieut. H. F. Rutledge, 7th A.F.A. Bde. Grazier; of Bungendore, N.S.W.; b. Goulburn, N.S.W., 11 March, 1891. Killed in action, 9 Oct., 1917.

<sup>21</sup> Lieut. C. B. King, M.C.; 8th A.F.A. Bde. Station hand; of Sydney; b. Randwick, N.S.W., 1897.

<sup>22</sup> Capt B. Macpherson, M.C.; 2/8th Bn., Lancashire Fusiliers. Cotton manufacturer's representative; of Manchester, Eng.; b. Manchester, 1 Sept., 1883.

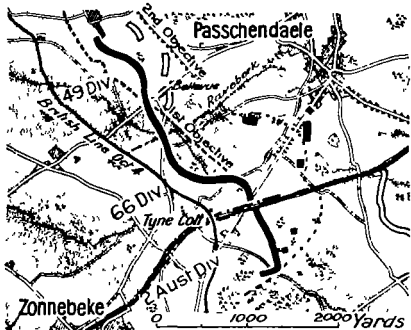
<sup>23</sup> The 2nd Australian Division had to go on and attack alone.

received little advantage from that circumstance. As the 1/4th York and Lancaster afterwards reported, the "irregularity and weakness of our field-gun barrage" left the Germans unhampered and their machine-guns unsuppressed.

No single German was found killed by shell-fire . . . there was no curtain of fire at all, and it was impossible to see where the edge of the barrage was intended to be.

The line of shells was not sufficiently accurate for its movement to be recognised; and whatever assistance it might have given was lost through delay in the mud of the Ravebeek. After crossing this, the 49th Division (on the old New Zealand front) was held up by the dense, unbroken wire and intact pillboxes on the Bellevue Spur. Meanwhile the Germans there directed a deadly fire into the flank of the 66th Division. Its left brigade, though some parties went far ahead, was held up 200-300 yards short of the first objective. About

noon, officers of the right brigade, which had penetrated much deeper on the Passchendaele Ridge, endeavoured to turn back a flank to face the fire from Bellevue. But neighbouring parts of their force, mistaking this movement for a withdrawal, retired, and the



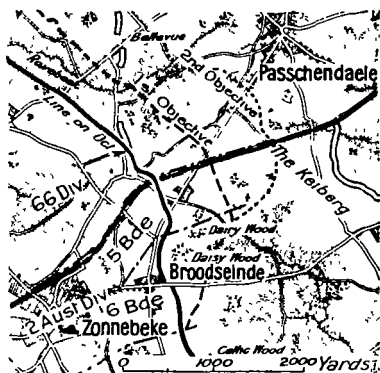
whole line near Passchendaele came back to the first objective. Meanwhile the 49th Division, in brave but futile efforts to push up its supports under fire from the Bellevue blockhouses, had incurred much additional loss. About 1 p.m. an airman reported flares along the final objective not only of the 66th but of the 49th Division, in one part beyond the wire and pillboxes of Bellevue Spur. The brigade staffs doubted the accuracy of the report, but they were ordered to push on and consolidate the line supposed to have been reached. Through difficulty of communication, this order could not be carried out, but during the night the reserve brigade tried to obtain touch with the supposed line. Its patrols immediately

ran into Germans.<sup>24</sup> The 66th Division also was ordered to retake its final objective at 5.15. The operation, however, was prevented by a heavy German barrage at that hour. A German counter-attack in the Ravebeek valley was easily stopped. The line of the 66th Division was at night reported as being a little in rear of the first objective.

The duty laid upon I Anzac this day was to form a flank for the 66th Division. The commander of the 197th Brigade afterwards reported that this flank, as well as his left flank, had been unsupported at the final objective. What happened was as follows.

The task was not extensive, and the two divisions that had made the great attack on October 4th were kept in the line to carry it out. But only the left division, the 2nd, was to make ground, and only its left brigade was to advance to any depth. The right brigade would merely blunt the angle by carrying out a shallow advance through Dairy and Daisy Woods. For the advance on the left, the 2nd Division employed its 5th (N.S. Wales) Brigade, which had been in reserve on October 4th. The 6th (Victoria) Brigade would make the shallow advance on the right.

In the rain that followed October 4th every available unit of I Anzac had been concentrating upon the basic task of constructing means of communication; and so great was the difficulty that on October 5th Birdwood had had to inform Plumer that the Second Army's proposals for exploitation, involving the advance of most of the heavy artillery to behind Tokio Spur, were beyond possibility of attainment so far as I Anzac was concerned. The light railway could not be pushed on in time. Smith's Road



<sup>24</sup> It is certain that the airman was mistaken. Late in the afternoon another airman marked down the line of British posts in the same relative positions, but 500 yards farther back.

would require great improvement before it could carry heavy artillery, and this single avenue could hardly suffice for all purposes of the corps. Plumer had already called on the X Corps to provide six infantry battalions to work upon the light railways of I and II Anzac. The almost desperate task of planking Smith's Road had been entrusted to Colonel Nicholson of I Anzac staff, who employed upon it the 1st and 2nd Pioneer Battalions. The 5th Pioneers worked upon the tramways. The engineers with infantry fatigues extended the duckwalks and buried the signal cables. When, on October 6th, the 6th Brigade came out of battle, its men, after a few hours' sleep in shell-holes in the rain, were roused for six hours' cable-laying. Having no overcoats, they carried their waterproof sheets as capes, and returned at dusk to find their shell-holes drenched. They slept there, some with their feet in water, and next day were sent to bury cables and work on the tramway. Under such treatment the 6th Brigade, and the 7th also, simply faded away. Hundreds were evacuated through exhaustion, hundreds more with incipient "trench feet." By October 9th the 6th Brigade was down to 600 available men, and the 7th to 800. It was suspected, when the 6th Brigade eventually went into the line, that certain numbers of men had temporarily deserted, but the 24th Battalion, which apparently investigated the matter, could find no definite cases.<sup>25</sup> The 5th Brigade, which had not been employed for the great attack, had still 2,000. The meaning of these cold figures in terms of human suffering may be judged from the notes of the Official War Correspondent, who described in his diary the men who met him on the duckboards on October 9th:<sup>26</sup>

It was on the Menin road that I first noticed the condition in which our men were coming back. A couple . . . passed us, going very slow. They were white and drawn and detached, and put one foot slowly in front of the other, as I had not seen men do since the Somme winter . . . but these men looked whiter. . . . On our way up the duckboards we met an officer of the 28th Battalion (7th Brigade) . . . who said that the mud was "nearly as bad as Flers." Murdoch asked if it were quite as bad. He shook his head: "Oh, no—we've never had anything quite like that!" A number of men of

<sup>25</sup> The process by which a company became so reduced without fighting may be illustrated by figures relating to a company of the 20th Battalion. This was 97 strong on Sept. 29. By Oct. 3 it had suffered 8 casualties; and 21 more had been hit or evacuated by Oct. 7. On the 8th 7 were killed or wounded, and 6 sent out exhausted. A few more were lost during the following night, bringing its strength on Oct. 9 to 50 or less.

<sup>26</sup> See Vol. XII., plate 399.

7th Bde. and 3rd Bde. coming out, the 7th Brigade always looking the worst and sometimes . . . looking like a dead man looks, and scarcely able to walk. . . . A man of the 20th Bn. (5th Brigade) limping. He had some wound inside the thigh . . . which was still bleeding. . . . As he passed us he grinned up and volunteered, "We got the b——s good on the second ridge." . . .

On October 7th, on being ordered to the line, the 6th Brigade arranged to send back to the reinforcement camp at Caestre 100 of the most exhausted men of each battalion, and bring up 100 fresh men in their place. The 100 for the 23rd Battalion had not arrived when, on the night of October 8th, the battalion went to the line to relieve the 19th (5th Brigade). Lieutenant-Colonel Beiers<sup>27</sup> of the 19th found the relieving battalion so weak that he at first refused to allow it to take over the front line. The 21st Battalion, which was to have been held in reserve, was accordingly ordered to take over half the front of the 23rd and to attack beside it.<sup>28</sup>

For convenience the railway had been adopted as the boundary between I and II Anzac in the forward area as well as in the rear.<sup>29</sup> In the early hours of October 9th the 20th Battalion (New South Wales), with the 17th (New South Wales) in rear, formed up on its tapes immediately south of "Defy Crossing" near "Tyne Cott."<sup>30</sup> Though stronger than those of the 6th Brigade, their companies were down to 50-60 men.<sup>31</sup> These were strung out by each battalion into a single line at wide intervals, the 20th keeping a flank group north of the railway. Of the infantry on the left

<sup>27</sup> Lieut-Col H. M. Beiers, M.C. Commanded 19th Bn., 1917/18. Constructional and mechanical engineer; of Wide Bay district, Q'land; b. Maryborough, Q'land, 17 March, 1889. Died, 28 Feb., 1940.

<sup>28</sup> The strength of the 21st with its reinforcement was 8 officers and 220 men.

<sup>29</sup> The 66th Division on the night of Oct. 6 handed over to the 7th Brigade the 41st Battalion's old front south of the railway. On the following night the 5th Brigade, then holding the rest of the divisional front, took over this part also. Thirty German aeroplanes had been over, and, during this relief, the German shelling became intense. In the 1st Division's sector Major A. Steele (Mt. Gambier, S. Aust.), the capable officer acting in command of the 11th Battalion, was killed, as was Lieut. L. C. Cooke (Cowcowing, W. Aust.), of the same battalion. Farther north a battery on the Keiberg was shooting direct into the 19th Battalion's trench near Daisy Wood. Near the railway the troops under Capt. Gould (27th Bn.) suffered over 40 casualties. On the crest a fluster of men, hurrying all ways, with a shrill voice issuing orders and curses in their midst, proved to be the 20th Battalion, caught in the barrage and being hauled into position by Colonel Ralston. Its rear company suffered many casualties. The sight of about 50 German infantry extended at Daisy Wood caused the S.O.S. signal to be fired. The barrage fell within two minutes, and the movement ceased, but from German records it does not appear that an attack was intended. The shelling, and the weakness of the 6th Brigade, delayed the relief of the 18th and 19th Battalions, which were to have made the coming attack. The 17th and 20th were therefore allotted for the operation.

<sup>30</sup> The 17th Battalion, at an hour before zero, withdrew 150 yards from the front line for the purpose.

<sup>31</sup> About 40 men of the 20th Battalion also went astray during the night.

no sign was seen. But a solitary machine-gun officer of the 66th Division, whose guns and crew had been hit or left in the mud, had struggled on to the railway cutting.

The outburst of the bombardment at 5.20 filled the air with sound, but the line of the eighteen-pounder barrage was difficult to discern. The 20th Battalion, which was not originally to have taken part, had brought in most of its junior officers to give them experience. Immediately after the start, part of the barrage seemed to shorten or to remain stationary,<sup>32</sup> and the 20th found itself beneath it, and suffered loss. The line also came under deadly enfilade from a German post firing across the railway from near the first objective of the 66th Division. Many casualties were suffered.<sup>33</sup> Fire from ahead was less troublesome, but as the right advanced it heard with deep anxiety the rattle of rifles and machine-guns continuing on its flank, and eventually on its left rear. A post ahead was easily outflanked, and a large number of Germans with several machine-guns captured.<sup>34</sup> The line of the 17th here caught up the 20th, and they went on to their first objective together.

The firing on the left flank came from a strong-post of Germans in an old dump of cement bags near Defy Crossing. Part of the 20th Battalion eventually worked behind it and captured 40 Germans.<sup>35</sup> The two battalions waited on their first objective in the muddy hollow before the Keiberg while the shells burst along the hedges and pillboxes on that hill. The pillboxes were constantly hit, but there was no dust or smoke-screen. A German machine-gun in a small wood ("Decline Copse")<sup>36</sup> on the left, where the railway cut through the hill, was firing throughout the pause in the

<sup>32</sup> Similar occurrences were noted by other units during the Passchendaele fighting.

<sup>33</sup> Including Lieuts. E. C. New and A. R. McDowell (17th), and Sergeants W. Wheate and E. A. Tate (20th) killed, and Capt. F. S. Hall and Lieut. T. McGill (20th) wounded. (New belonged to Haberfield, N.S.W.; McDowell to Marrickville, N.S.W.; Wheate to Sydney, N.S.W., and Liverpool, Eng.; Tate to Kangaroo Valley, N.S.W.; Hall to Ootha, N.S.W.; McGill to Lewisham, N.S.W.)

<sup>34</sup> The portion of the 20th attacking this post was led by its N.C.O's, although two of them, R S M. C. A. Pryor (Sydney) and Sergeant A. E. Bladwell (Wagga Wagga, N.S.W.) were hampered by wounds. They had only one rifle-grenade. This was fired by Sergeant C. D. G. Fleming (Nelson, N.Z., and Sydney), and C S M. T. W. Gooda (Warralda, N.S.W.), but went wide. The troops, however, worked round the Germans, threw a couple of bombs, and then rushed them.

<sup>35</sup> Sergeant H. C. M. Sharp (Millmerran, Q'land) was given the task of clearing another machine-gun from in front of the 66th Division. He took with him L/cpl J. S. Reid (Enfield, N.S.W.) and one other man. They captured the gun, killed part of the crew, and brought back several prisoners. These were at once used, with others, for carrying back wounded.

<sup>36</sup> See Vol. XII, plate 401.



advance. A much nearer wood, "Decoy Copse," in the hollow in front of the centre, was cleared by Lieutenant Edwards<sup>37</sup> of the 20th with a few men.<sup>38</sup> Few parties of the enemy this day offered more than a feeble resistance to either the 2nd Australian or 66th Division. The mere approach of the troops set many bolting from Decoy Wood and the Keiberg hedges, with the Australian machine-guns playing on them. Another party of the 20th seized "Rhine" (known to the Germans as Keiberg North), the fortified ruin of a farm



lying beyond the right of the 5th Brigade's sector. The 6th Brigade was not yet up; its nearest battalion (23rd) had veered northwards behind the 17th, missing Dairy Wood from which Germans were now firing with a machine-gun into the rear of the 5th Brigade. Fortunately it shot high. By arrangement with Lieutenant Allan<sup>39</sup> the 23rd, as it advanced, dropped posts along the flank of the 17th, ending at Rhine, and thus safeguarding the flank.

The intensification of the barrage signalling the time for the further advance was not easily detected. On the right, at about the proper time, Lieutenants Allan, Lyons, and Ham<sup>40</sup> of the 17th, with about thirty men in all, pushed on independently towards the most conspicuous landmark above the hedges of the Keiberg, a large barn known as "Assyria."<sup>41</sup> In the intervening hedges two German posts were captured, together with 17 men<sup>42</sup> and 3 machine-guns. To extend the flank, a few groups of two or three men each were dropped by the right as it advanced. Severe fire from the hedges around Assyria presently stopped this flank, but Lieutenants

<sup>37</sup> Lieut. C. C. Edwards, M.M.; 20th Bn. Labourer; of Rockhampton, Q'land; b. Rockhampton, 1890. Killed in action, 9 Oct., 1917.

<sup>38</sup> He captured a dozen Germans. Sergeant Sharp and L/Cpl. Reid also beat through this wood, Reid being killed by a sniper as they returned.

<sup>39</sup> Capt. H. T. Allan, M.C.; 17th Bn. University student; of Hunter's Hill, N.S.W.; b. Hunter's Hill, 5 Jan., 1895.

<sup>40</sup> Lieut. W. J. Ham, 17th Bn. Accountant; of Mosman, N.S.W.; b. Miller's Point, N.S.W., 3 July, 1893.

<sup>41</sup> See Vol. XII, plate 387.

<sup>42</sup> Of these, 10 were captured by Corporal W. O. Rabey (Windsor district and Five Dock, N.S.W.), 17th Bn.

Lyons and Ham drove the Germans from several posts between Assyria and the railway.

It was at the railway cutting that the fight was heaviest. Here the left of the 20th came on with the 17th. Most of the officers had already fallen, but, after a pause at a road-bank at the foot of the hill, a wounded officer of the 5th Machine Gun Company—apparently Lieutenant Gritten, who with Gilchrist and Rentoul had led Gellibrand's forlorn hope at Bullecourt—gave the word to advance. Lieutenant Dickens<sup>43</sup> (17th) ordered Company Sergeant-Major Raitt<sup>44</sup> to form a party and bomb the dugouts along the foot of the northern bank of the railway cutting while others captured the height on both sides. As Raitt bombed the nearer entrances, Germans bolted from the farther ones and fled through the distant end of the cutting. Having cleared the dugouts, he climbed the southern side of the cutting and joined a wounded officer of the 20th and two wounded men in a shell-hole. At the same time Lieutenant Gritten and his machine-gun crew climbed the northern bank and turned their gun on the fleeing enemy.



The 5th Brigade was thus on its objective, but quite alone, and with numbers too small to eject those Germans who remained between its posts. Within five minutes German machine-guns swept away Gritten's post, wounding every one in it and driving them from their gun to shelter in the cutting. On the southern side, ten yards from Raitt's shell-hole, were Germans in another shell-hole, with a machine-gun. With a bomb Raitt set them in flight and, chasing them into a trench, ran against another German. Being too close to use his bayonet, Raitt knocked the man down and then shot him. But he himself was now quite alone, and the Germans were coming back in numbers. Raitt dived for the cutting, found it empty except for dead and wounded, and, as the Germans entered it, he escaped along the railway. Other parties had

<sup>43</sup> Lieut. G. M. Dickens, 17th Bn. Insurance clerk; of Ashfield, N.S.W.; b. Ashfield, 24 June, 1884. Killed in action, 9 Oct., 1917.

<sup>44</sup> R.S.M. J. W. Raitt, M.M. (No. 1276; 17th Bn.). Labourer; of Sydney; b. Inverberrie, Scotland, 1888.

much the same experience. On the right Allan had had to fall back 300 yards. The centre posts were driven, first, from the summit, and, later, from the slope. The first objective was held, but, of the troops in front, Lieutenants Gritten (5th Machine Gun Company), Dickens and Lyons (17th Battalion), and Lumb<sup>45</sup> (20th), and a number of their men were never seen again.

It was just when the Australian left was driven off the Keiberg that parties of the 66th Division were observed advancing on Passchendaele Ridge. Meanwhile news had reached 5th Brigade Headquarters that the advance was unsupported on the left. Accordingly, at 9.15 the 18th and part of the 19th Battalions were sent forward.<sup>46</sup> By that time, however, the advanced line had been lost,<sup>47</sup> and these troops merely helped to form the line along the first objective and to safeguard the left flank.

The 6th Brigade attacked on a front of 1,200 yards with all four battalions, their objectives from north to south being as follows:—

<i>Unit.</i>	<i>Objective.</i>
23rd Bn. . . .	Rhine (beyond Dairy Wood)
21st Bn. . . .	Knoll 38 (beyond interval between Dairy and Daisy Woods)
24th Bn. . . .	Edge of Busy Wood (beyond Daisy Wood)
22nd Bn. . . .	Neighbourhood of old German headquarters at sandpit on Moorslede road.

Their average strength at the starting point was only 7 officers and 150 others. At least half of these, however, were fresh from the nucleus at Caestre.

<sup>45</sup> Lieut. E. F. Lumb, 20th Bn. Packer; of Sydney; b. Woolwich, Eng., 1883. Killed in action, 9 Oct., 1917.

<sup>46</sup> The 18th had moved up to the old front line, and, in accordance with orders, established a new headquarters on Broodseinde Ridge. The pillbox chosen—the only one large enough—lay in view of the Germans, and was also in their new barrage line. At this place Lieut. A. V. L. Hull, signalling officer, while sending a message by Lucas lamp, was sniped through the neck. He was pulled into a shell-hole and his wound was dressed. Later, an incendiary shell ignited the camouflage of brushwood and the timber of the dugout. Lieut. A. W. Irvine pulled Lieut. A. T. Doig out of the fire, but Hull, Sergeant R. G. Fountain, and 10 others were killed. (Hull belonged to Lockhart, N.S.W.; Irvine to Sydney and Wanaaring, N.S.W.; Doig to North Sydney and Wagga Wagga, N.S.W.; Fountain to Woy Woy, N.S.W.)

<sup>47</sup> One company of the 19th had been ordered to form a defensive flank along the railway, but it lost its officers by a single shell. Lieut. H. E. B. Smith (Annandale, N.S.W.) being killed, and Lieut. F. B. Forster (North Sydney), wounded. Lieut. L. H. Bignell (Flemington, Vic., and Marrickville, N.S.W.), of the next company, was about to lead on the officerless troops when their advance was stopped near the first objective by a subaltern of the 17th, who said that the remnant of his battalion was back there.

So thin was the barrage that from the first the German machine-guns played almost with impunity upon the advancing parties. On the right the two detachments of the 22nd under Captain Bunning<sup>48</sup> and Lieutenant Anderson,<sup>49</sup> attacking the neighbourhood of the old German headquarters at the sandpit, reached the area of their objective, dug in with the German posts close beside them, and suffered heavily in the fighting with these.<sup>50</sup>

Next on the left, the 24th Battalion had 200 yards to go before reaching Daisy Wood. Half-way across it met strong rifle-fire from the wood, and the right company, under Captain Williams<sup>51</sup> when a little further on, was checked by opposition from the hedges near the sandpit. At that hour only the flashes of the enemy's shots could be seen. First Williams, then Lieutenant Pickett (of Bullecourt fame), going forward to bomb these Germans, were shot dead, and Lieutenant Nation<sup>52</sup> was wounded, but Sergeant Prime<sup>53</sup> with a dozen surviving men formed a post at the southern corner of the wood. Meanwhile the left company had just reached the wood when a machine-gun was suddenly switched upon it from near Dairy Wood, 150 yards farther north. This almost wiped out the left.<sup>54</sup> Under Captain Smythe, the centre had pushed on into the copse, a thin stubble resembling Polygon Wood, and now swung round facing this



<sup>48</sup> Capt. W. H. Bunning, M.C.; 22nd Bn. Clerk and paymaster; of North Fitzroy, Vic.; b. Clifton Hill, Vic., 22 Feb., 1894.

<sup>49</sup> Lieut. K. S. Anderson, M.C.; 22nd Bn. Clerk; of Portland, Vic.; b. Portland, 8 May, 1892.

<sup>50</sup> The southern party, under Capt. Bunning, reached its position under cover of rifle grenades, but Lieut. J. D. Campbell (Warrnambool, Vic., and Narngulu, W. Aust.), 6th M.G. Coy., was killed and, while digging in, Lieut. A. Skene-Smith (Philippine Islands and Melbourne) was sniped. As he lay on a stretcher he was hit again and killed. The northern party, under Lieut. Anderson, when it had gone 20 yards, was almost wiped out by machine-gun fire, but eight survivors under Lieut. P. G. Chalmers (Ballarat, Vic.) pushed on.

<sup>51</sup> Capt. C. M. Williams, M.C., 24th Bn. Station overseer; of Willandra, N.S.W., and Melbourne; b. Cairns, Q'land, 2 July, 1891. Killed in action, 9 Oct., 1917.

<sup>52</sup> Lieut. N. C. Nation, 24th Bn. Accountant; of Malvern, Vic.; b. Moore Park, Sydney, 1888. Killed in action, 9 Oct., 1917.

<sup>53</sup> Sgt. A. G. Prime, M.M. (No. 933; 24th Bn.). Clerk; of Castlemaine, Vic.; b. Castlemaine, 25 Dec., 1896.

<sup>54</sup> Lieuts. R. M. Oliver (West Melbourne) and G. W. Day (Camberwell, Vic.) were among the wounded.

gun.<sup>55</sup> It was most difficult to detect, but Lieutenant Scales and Sergeant Radley<sup>56</sup> eventually caught sight of it in a heap of bricks between Daisy and Dairy Woods. They sniped several of the Germans, who thenceforward could only make hurried shots.

The 21st, which should have passed between the woods, was mostly held up before reaching them. Lieutenants Hogan<sup>57</sup> and Place<sup>58</sup> were killed on their edge.<sup>59</sup> Sergeants Bowler,<sup>60</sup> Weir,<sup>61</sup> and Warren<sup>62</sup> got through and established posts far out, that of Bowler being in touch with the 23rd at Rhine. The action of the 23rd, which veered north of Dairy Wood<sup>63</sup> on the flank of the 17th, has already been described.

The 6th Brigade had thus placed a few posts near its objective, but there were German posts in their rear, and most of the brigade was held up in front of these or among them. It was observed that immediately the attack was launched the German batteries assumed that their forward area was lost, and shelled it. The posts of each side signalled to their respective aeroplanes, which came over alternately; the German infantry fired flares to attract the attention of its airman, and the Australians waved maps, or lit ground flares for theirs. Divisional headquarters thus received early information of the position of the Australian posts, but no other news. Few runners lived to get through. The four battalion commanders of the 6th Brigade<sup>64</sup> were rendered anxious by the thinness of their line. The 28th Battalion

<sup>55</sup> Lieut. B. F. Nicholas (Trafalgar, Vic.), after making touch between the centre and right, was killed by it.

<sup>56</sup> Sgt. J. J. Radley, M.M. (No. 262; 24th Bn.). Farm hand; of Chiltern, Vic.; b. South Melbourne, 1891.

<sup>57</sup> Lieut. A. D. Hogan, 21st Bn. Jewellery salesman and optician; of Lismore and Wagga Wagga, N.S.W.; b. Sydney, 30 Nov., 1886. Killed in action, 9 Oct., 1917.

<sup>58</sup> Lieut. H. L. Place, D.C.M.; 21st Bn. Blacksmith, of Murat Bay, S. Aust.; b. Fowler's Bay, S. Aust., 1 Aug., 1893. Killed in action, 9 Oct., 1917.

<sup>59</sup> Lieut. D. G. Armstrong (Kyneton, Vic.) had been killed and Lieut. H. N. Garton and 10 men wounded before reaching the jumping-off position.

<sup>60</sup> Lieut. T. L. Bowler, D.C.M.; 21st Bn. Engine-driver; of Burnley, Vic.; b. Elsternwick, Vic., 6 Jan., 1886.

<sup>61</sup> Lieut. R. L. Weir, M.C., D.C.M.; 21st Bn. Pastoralist; of Bundoora, Vic.; b. Croxton, Vic., 1894. Killed in action, 26 July, 1918.

<sup>62</sup> Sgt. A. Warren, M.M. (No. 1784; 21st Bn.). Farm hand; of Cathcart, Vic.; b. Bilston, Staffs, Eng., 1892. Killed in action, 9 Oct., 1917.

<sup>63</sup> Advancing towards the wood, Capt. A. J. Noall (Geelong, Vic.) was wounded, and Lieut. W. O. Frost (Haberfield, N.S.W.) killed.

<sup>64</sup> Some months earlier, misunderstandings between himself and the divisional staff had caused Gellibrand to ask for relief from the brigade command. Birdwood was eager to compose the difficulty, but Gellibrand would not take the opportunity offered for explanation. Gellibrand's request was therefore granted, and he was temporarily sent to a training command in England. The task of his successor, General Paton, was difficult, for the battalion commanders could not accustom themselves to the change. In the present operation they shared a common headquarters and endeavoured to conduct the operation between them, merely asking for support as they needed it.

had already reinforced it, and the 27th was now ordered up to the old British trench near Daisy Wood.<sup>65</sup> It found the old front line already crowded with troops driven back, and could only stay there and be shelled.<sup>66</sup> Dairy Wood and half of Daisy Wood being still untaken were a menace to the 5th Brigade's right, and its brigadier, General Smith, had decided to use his last reserve, two companies of the 19th under Captain Taylor<sup>67</sup> in clearing them. Reaching Nieuwemolen, Taylor sent an N.C.O. (Corporal Lynch<sup>68</sup>) and two scouts along the hedges to Rhine, where he knew the 17th should be, and, on seeing them arrive safely, brought up a platoon by twos and threes to line out on the northern edge of Dairy Wood. When, despite sharp fire, they arrived, he ordered up the rest under Lieutenant Blake,<sup>69</sup> and then, covered by their fire, scoured Dairy Wood,<sup>70</sup> and captured a German post immediately south of it. Fire now received was traced to a trench in Daisy Wood marked by a line of German helmets. Taylor had them completely enfiladed, and, covered by a Lewis gun, he and Lieutenant Roy Smith<sup>71</sup> with eight men made for the place. A few Germans bolted. A white flag was waved, and 15 of the enemy surrendered.<sup>72</sup>

Taylor's party had, unknowingly, been assisted by Lieutenant Scales (24th) in Daisy Wood. Seeing that the Germans in the post near him were turning round their machine-gun upon the approaching men, Scales had crawled out, shot the gunner and five other Germans, and then rushed the post and captured the machine-gun. This cleared the opposition at Daisy Wood, and Stokes mortars under Lieutenant Painter<sup>73</sup> had suppressed those at the sandpit.

<sup>65</sup> The 25th and 26th reinforced the 5th Brigade farther north.

<sup>66</sup> By this shelling the 27th alone lost Captain E. S. Gould and Lieuts. J. Jury and S. Organ killed, and Lieut. R. B. Coulter mortally wounded. Two companies of the 27th were eventually withdrawn. In the 25th Captain S. S. Bond was killed (Gould belonged to Unley, S. Aust.; Jury to Magill, S. Aust.; Organ to Cheltenham, Vic.; Coulter to St. Peter's, S. Aust.; Bond to South Brisbane).

<sup>67</sup> While in support on the crest, Taylor's company had been shelled, Lieut. F. R. Bennett (Guildford, W. Aust., and Rose Bay, N.S.W.) being killed, and Lieut. A. L. Lillie (North Sydney) wounded.

<sup>68</sup> Cpl. P. J. Lynch, M.M. (No. 915; 19th Bn.). Letter sorter; of Summer Hill, N.S.W.; b. Forest Lodge, N.S.W., 1891.

<sup>69</sup> Capt. L. W. Blake, M.C.; 19th Bn. Telegraphist; of Sydney; b. Brisbane, 16 Sept., 1889.

<sup>70</sup> The machine-gun was found abandoned, in a log shelter.

<sup>71</sup> Lieut. R. A. W. Smith, 10th Bn. Surveyor's assistant; of Annandale, N.S.W.; b. Annandale, 1894. Died of wounds, 15 Oct., 1917.

<sup>72</sup> They were unwilling to go to the rear, explaining by signs that German posts farther back would shoot them. Lieut. Smith, standing urging them to start, was mortally wounded. The Germans were sent to the rear carrying him, and, as they feared, were shot at, one being wounded.

<sup>73</sup> Lieut. L. G. W. Painter, M.M.; 13rd Bn. Carpenter; of North Carlton, Vic.; b. Ringwood, Vic., 1897.

Captain Smythe (24th), with Lieutenant Blake and Sergeant O'Hara<sup>74</sup> (19th) and Lieutenant Gow (24th), enclosed the wood in the line of posts. Before dark, through the persistency of Taylor and Smythe, the essential parts of the 6th Brigade's objective had been secured.<sup>75</sup>

At this time the 66th Division also still held most of its first objective. At dusk, however, lines of Germans were seen advancing both north of the railway against the 66th Division and over the northern end of the Keiberg against the 5th Brigade.<sup>76</sup> The farthest Australian outposts, near Rhine, were much too weak to be maintained with safety. After firing the S.O.S. signal, Lieutenant Allan withdrew his post; others were either killed or captured.<sup>77</sup> The barrage caught the Germans as they descended the Keiberg, and no counter-attack came through. But during the night, when the 66th Division fell back farther, the Australian post next to the railway also withdrew. Thenceforth the junction of the divisions was at Defy Crossing.

In order to cause the enemy to spread his artillery-fire for an hour or two, instead of concentrating it upon the main front, the 1st Australian Division had, at zero hour of the attack, raided against Celtic Wood, a large, broken copse containing many pillboxes.<sup>78</sup> Though reported as successful,



Route taken by Taylor shown by dotted line.

<sup>74</sup> Sgt. W. H. O'Hara, D.C.M. (No. 1260; 19th Bn.). Carpenter; of Sydney; b. Waipiti, N.Z., 1890. Died of wounds, 4 Oct., 1918.

<sup>75</sup> A telephone line was brought some way towards the new front.

<sup>76</sup> In the morning, also, at 9.25, the barrage had been called down upon a force of the enemy advancing on the southern end of the Keiberg.

<sup>77</sup> Lieut. Lyons (17th Bn.) had been killed, as was Sergeant Warren (21st). Lieuts. A. G. Walsley (Kensington, Vic.), H. H. Corney (Kyneton and St. Kilda, Vic.), and B. Bollingham (Richmond, Vic.) of the 21st were missing. Of the 22nd's posts, that under Lieut. Chalmers was blown out by a shell at noon, and Capt. Bunning, after beating off two attempts by the enemy to approach, found his post isolated, and withdrew it after nightfall.

<sup>78</sup> The edge of this copse had been successfully raided on the night of Oct. 6 by 2 officers and 60 others of the 11th and 12th Battalions, 15 prisoners of the 448th I.R. (233rd Division) and a machine-gun being captured. On the same night the 18th Battalion raided south of the Moorslede road, 13 prisoners of the 450th I.R. and a machine-gun being captured.

the operation ended disastrously.<sup>79</sup> Of 85 officers and men, only 14 had by next day returned unwounded. The missing were never heard of again. Their names were not in any list of prisoners received during the war. The Graves Commission found no trace of their bodies after it.<sup>80</sup>

All the German divisions facing the Second Army's attack had been relieved since October 4. The thrust of II Anzac fell upon the 16th and 195th, and that of I Anzac on the 233rd. The previous order to increase the front-line garrisons had been cancelled by the Fourth German Army on October 7, but the new system of conditionally holding the forward zone had not yet been fully adopted. For counter-attack against II Anzac the enemy employed the line divisions and parts of the 20th and 45th Reserve, which had suffered so heavily in the previous fighting. But the difficulties of the three previous battle-days were largely absent—in the soft ground (says the history of the 210th R.I.R.) the British barrage lost much of its effect. Nevertheless the casualties of the 195th Division were extremely severe. Opposite I Anzac the 233rd Division re-established its line with its own reserves,<sup>81</sup> the counter-attack division (220th) merely sending a battalion to support.

<sup>79</sup> The raid was to be covered by five batteries of field artillery firing on a front of some 800 yards, but the fire appeared so thin (reference to the events related on pp. 902-6 will show why) that the infantry was uncertain when it began. The troops were fresh from Caestre camp, and keen, if inexperienced. They advanced by clock-time, and were seen to enter the north-western end of the wood. A party under Lieut. F. J. Scott (Gawler, S. Aust.) worked behind the foremost German posts, which began to retreat, but the South Australians were then attacked from the farther end of the wood. A few wounded men returned early in the night, and some others after dark. Of the five officers, Lieuts. Scott and A. N. Rae (Kilkenny, S. Aust.) were known to have been killed, Lieuts. R. P. James (Renmark, S. Aust.) and L. B. Laurie (Salisbury, S. Aust.) were wounded, and Lieut. W. H. Wilsdon (Caltowie, S. Aust.) was missing. Next day stretcher-bearers with improvised red-cross flags attempted to approach the wood in search of other wounded; but about this time there had been some shooting of stretcher-bearers on both sides on a neighbouring part of the I Anzac front—such incidents usually arose through suspicion that the red-cross flag was being misused, or through the spread of largely untrue propaganda as to treachery. This time the bearers were shot down despite their flags. So far as has been ascertained, the records of the 448th I.R., the German regiment which held the sector, contain no mention of the attack.

<sup>80</sup> The 2nd Division's casualties (total, 1,253) were:—

5th Infantry Brigade.			6th Infantry Brigade.			7th Infantry Brigade.		
	Off.	O.R.		Off.	O.R.		Off.	O.R.
17th Bn.	12	177	21st Bn.	8	160	25th Bn.	2	50
18th Bn.	5	53	22nd Bn.	3	45	26th Bn.	—	32
19th Bn.	8	82	23rd Bn.	2	59	27th Bn.	4	39
20th Bn.	6	145	24th Bn.	9	104	28th Bn.	1	58
5th M.G. Coy.	2	26	6th M.G. Coy.	2	26	7th M.G. Coy.	—	17
5th L.T.M. Bty.	—	3	6th L.T.M. Bty.	—	1	7th L.T.M. Bty.	—	4
	33	486		24	395		7	200
Artillery	3	29	Signal Coy.	2	4	Pioneers	3	34
Engineers	2	12	22nd M.G. Coy.	—	12	Fld. Amb.	1	6

<sup>81</sup> The 449th I.R., south of the railway, had been driven back, and the 450th, farther south, had to throw back its flank. The commander of the 449th I.R. ordered a counter-attack at 4.30. The divisional commander cancelled this, considering that it required thorough preparation by artillery. The corps commander then ordered a counter-attack at 5.30 by both regiments from the south-east. The 449th, however, received the order too late. The 450th merely extended its flank northwards and obtained touch.



## CHAPTER XXII

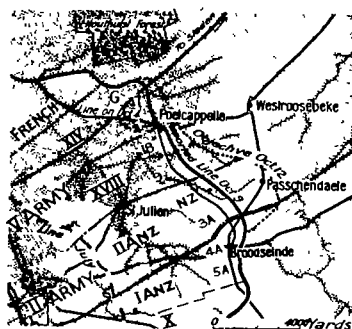
### PASSCHENDAELE II—OCTOBER 12TH

THE success of the left of the Fifth Army, and of the French, on the lowlands did much to redeem from failure the effort of October 9th, and the total repulse on the ridge was at first screened by the fact that until after nightfall parts of the 66th Division were still near their first objective. Accordingly Plumer, presumably after consulting General Godley, informed G.H.Q.—

I am of opinion that the operations of the 49th and 66th Divisions, carried out to-day under great difficulties of assembly, will afford the II Anzac Corps a sufficiently good jumping off line for operations on October 12th, on which date I hope that the II Anzac Corps will capture Passchendaele. . . .

This adhered to the programme already arranged. For the coming operation II Anzac was to bring in again the 3rd Australian and the New Zealand Divisions. As before, I Anzac again would maintain the southern flank, the 5th and 4th Divisions relieving the worn-out 1st and 2nd.

The coming attack was not favoured by Gough, who was consistently averse from attacking in the wet, and who had been informed by the XVIII Corps that II Anzac



was not so far advanced as it supposed itself to be. Moreover the Fifth Army, being short of fresh troops, could undertake no extensive operation. However, as Plumer had decided that an attack was practicable, Gough agreed to safeguard the Second Army's flank, pivoting on his left at Houthulst Forest. On October 10th, Haig issued the order for the attack.

At the moment when this order was given, little was known of the true experiences and results of the recent fight. But, before the coming attack was launched, there was time to ascertain what had happened, and this duty rested in particular on General Godley and the staff of II Anzac.<sup>1</sup> Obviously, there was every reason for caution: the advance

<sup>1</sup> As the divisions were changed, II Anzac Headquarters was the lowest staff to participate in the two operations (Oct. 9 and 12).

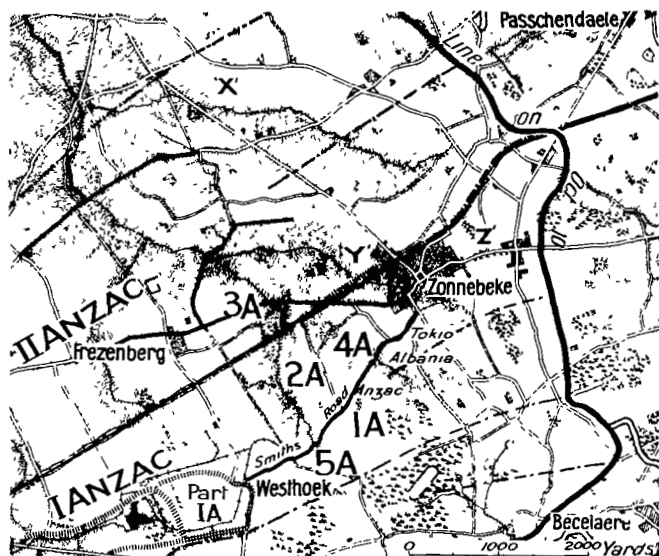
projected for the II Anzac divisions was now not 1,500, but from 2,000 to 2,500 yards. The interval between the attacks—the time available for bombardment and other preparation of all sorts—was not six or eight days, but three. Presumably the reason for this was the supposed weakening of the enemy's morale. Plumer and Harington still believed that far-reaching strategic success was possible, and, at this stage, in contrast with their earlier caution, they tended to propose objectives beyond the capacity of the troops. For example, they would have liked I Anzac at this time to carry out the extraordinarily difficult operation of seizing the Keiberg; and they hoped that at a subsequent stage, when the Canadian Corps advanced down the eastern slope to Magermeirie, I Anzac would take Moorslede. On October 8th General Birdwood had to point out that there was no hope of any of the I Anzac divisions being able to last through such operations.<sup>2</sup> The 2nd was already exhausted,<sup>3</sup> the 4th was to advance the flank on October 12th, and the 5th, after three days' carrying through the mud, would be no longer fresh. In view of the condition of the troops and of the ground, Birdwood was obliged to limit the action of I Anzac to the least that would suffice for maintaining II Anzac's flank.

The objective being deep, the forward movement of the artillery had to be continued at urgent pressure. Guns in course of movement could not be used for the bombardment, and, as only three days were available for the bombardment, it could not be—and was not—carried out on a scale comparable with those for the previous strokes. The Germans noted that effective counter-battery fire in the intervals between attacks had almost ceased. Actually, in spite of immense efforts by gunners and roadmakers between the 4th and 12th of October, it was found impossible for most batteries to reach by the 9th, or even by the 12th, their intended positions. In II Anzac, for the artillery in the 3rd Division's sector, a circuit road had been planned, the

<sup>2</sup> Birdwood and White pointed out that an attack on Moorslede and the Keiberg, if made, could best be undertaken from the north-west. The 4th Division would be used on Oct. 12, and the subsequent capture of the Keiberg would exhaust the 5th.

<sup>3</sup> General Paton of the 6th Brigade had been warned by several of his battalions that their men were unfit for the operations of the 9th. General Smyth (2nd Divn.) accordingly went forward with him to inspect the conditions. The two generals themselves had great difficulty in getting through the mud. Smyth warned Birdwood of the troops' condition.

engineers to work on the northern half and the 3rd Pioneers on the southern. But the time was too short; the plank supply almost entirely failed, and the track was impassable. Many batteries, including heavy ones, had to be stopped on the forward slope of Frezenberg ridge in positions in full view



Position of the main part of certain divisional artilleries on Oct. 12 (indicated by the divisional name). Data are not available for other divisions. "X," "Y," "Z" show positions originally intended to be taken up by forward artillery. New or remade roads are shown black, plank roads hachured. No data exist showing how far the 11 Anzac roads were planked.

of the Germans. It was at first hoped that these sites would be occupied only for a day or two, but it gradually became evident that they were more or less permanent. The 55th (Australian) Siege Battery, after immense labour in moving, carried out a shoot against the Bellevue Spur in daylight, with a section commander, Lieutenant Dobson,<sup>4</sup> observing from between his guns. The artillery of the 3rd Australian Division was crowded along short lengths of plank road hurriedly laid off the main Frezenberg-Zonnebeke road, a mile short of the intended position. Five of the batteries of one brigade (7th) were in sight of Passchendaele village.

<sup>4</sup> Lieut-Col P W Dobson M.C., 55th Siege Bty. Officer of Aust Permanent Forces; of Melbourne; b. South Yarra, Vic., 16 July, 1892.

The zero point (says the diary of the 29th Battery) was Passchendaele church, which could be seen from the battery. . . . For the first time the layers were able to use direct laying and see the effect of their shoot. . . . The guns sank lower into the mud with each shot. But planks . . . timber, and sandbags were secured from all round the district, and eventually fairly good platforms were obtained. . . . Further forward, down hill, about 150 yards, our other four batteries had to get in. In front of them the country was an absolute quagmire and impossible to occupy. . . . The whole eight batteries were as close to the Zonnebeke road as possible in the hope of getting ammunition up . . . for it was quite impossible to move across country at any time. As it was, many horses, on the short stretch of road from the road to the battery, 80 yards of ground, sank down out of sight, the driver just keeping the (horse's) head up until assistance arrived.

Higher on the same slope, also in view of the enemy, one artillery brigade (330th) of the 66th Division succeeded on October 9th in getting twenty-five guns into action more than a mile in rear of their desired site. Owing to the congestion of the Zonnebeke road, the other brigade (331st) could not take position until long after the attack had gone forward. The Frezenberg-Zonnebeke road itself, crowded with ammunition waggons, pack-horses, and ration carts, was in view of Passchendaele. But apparently that village held no artillery observers, for the Frezenberg batteries suffered only "area shoots" and the road was not constantly barraged. Whenever it was shelled, traffic was stopped, and often remained so until the road was repaired by the pioneers, working with the utmost speed.

The difficulty of getting forward the guns was apparently common to all the attacking troops, although the defence was free from it. The following details have been gleaned from the incomplete records of I and II Anzac:—

*October 4th.* I Anzac: Four 18-pounders and one 4.5 howitzer battery of the 2nd Australian Division managed to move one section each to behind Anzac Spur during the evening and night. Of the 4th Division's artillery the 38th, 39th, 41st, and 110th Batteries pulled some guns to Albania Valley, but had to leave three bogged in Smith's Road.

*October 5th.* I Anzac: The 4th A.F.A. Brigade (2nd Division) finished moving to Anzac Ridge, while the pioneers made tracks for guns on Tokio Spur.

II Anzac: A brigade of the 3rd British Division's artillery moved to the shelter of Tokio Spur, and the 3rd Australian Division's artillery down the forward slope of Frezenberg ridge. In the left sector the 49th Division's artillery, intended for Gravenstafel Ridge, had to stop a mile short in the Steenbeek valley south of St. Julien.

*October 6th.* I Anzac: All the afternoon and night, and on October 7th, the 1st Division's artillery struggled to reach positions behind

Anzac Ridge. The 2nd Division's guns were still moving forward. Smith's Road had to be closed by I Anzac for repair. The 4th Division's artillery tried other routes, but found them impassable.

II Anzac: The 3rd Division's artillery finished its modified advance. Advance of N.Z. Division's artillery was hampered by the closing of forward roads.

*October 7th.* I Anzac: The intention of advancing heavy artillery to the shelter of Anzac Ridge for counter-battery work was abandoned. The diary of the 11th A.F.A. Brigade (4th Division) says—"Heavy rain during night. Ground a sea of mud. Guns were ordered to advance. With superhuman efforts some were got forward to new positions. A few were bogged. Almost hopeless task to get them out. Our boys are determined to do so, and will."

II Anzac: Owing to the number of its guns put out of action, the 3rd Australian Divisional Artillery had to borrow 13 pieces from the 66th Division's artillery, which had not yet come in.

*October 8th.* I Anzac: A fine morning with a drying wind. Batteries of the 1st Division trying hard to complete their moves.

II Anzac: When the 55th Siege Battery, after great exertion, had two guns on the road, moving to "Spree Farm," its movement order was countermanded ("very distressing to battery personnel," noted Captain Manchester<sup>5</sup>). The artillery of the 66th Division begins to move in.

*October 9th.* I Anzac: 1st Australian Division had now 24 guns behind Anzac Ridge, 15 others in the old position, behind Westhoek, and 3 on the road. But, of this total, 10 were out of action through various causes, leaving the two brigades 19 guns short. The diary of the 11th A.F.A. Brigade (4th Division) says—"Our guns which were bogged yesterday we found impossible to move. Also three guns which were ordered forward were bogged 400 yards from their position."

II. Anzac: Half of the 66th Division's artillery could not reach its position, and was unable to cover the attack.

The diary of an Australian who traversed the battlefield on October 9th says:—

Our guns . . . were wonderfully far up—right up in front of Anzac Ridge by Zonnebeke, some of them, and behind Hill 35 others. It was, I believe, an almost superhuman feat . . . and the light railways brought up some of our heavies too. One pair of 6-inch hows. got off the rails 15 times but were pushed up in the end.

Corps and army headquarters were of course aware that these difficulties reduced the number of barrels supporting each attacking division, and it was ordered that, if a battery was short of guns, its remaining pieces should increase their rate of fire in compensation. But shortage of guns was only one of many conditions affecting the artillery. The shell-supply came up on pack-animals. The total labour may be judged by the fact that, on October 9th, the 1st Division's ammunition column had 50 pack-mules and their drivers

<sup>5</sup> Brigadier G E Manchester. Commanded 55th Siege Bty, 1918-19. Officer of Aust. Permanent Forces, of Sydney, b. Coburg, Vic., 7 July, 1885.

working to the 101st Battery, 94 to the 102nd, 80 to the 2nd, and 25 to the 6th, besides 12 general service waggons and 6 pack-teams carrying ammunition to the forward dump. Even on the roads the animals constantly floundered in deep shell-holes, impossible to detect owing to the covering of liquid mud.

In some cases (says the diary of the 29th Battery) it took 17 hours to make the journey from waggon lines to battery position. . . . In normal times this trip could be done comfortably in an hour. . . . Very often men were dragged out (of the mud) minus their boots and breeches.

Ammunition became coated with mud and unusable until cleaned. Less well realised was the fact that the experienced personnel, living in sodden shell-holes, quickly dwindled, through exhaustion and sickness, and the system of relief for gun-detachments and telephonists broke down.

All dugouts and gun platforms were soon flooded. . . . At the waggon lines . . . for many nights the men slept on wet blankets or at best on sodden straw. . . . This existence soon had its effect. Influenza and dysentery cases were numerous. Owing to many evacuations the battery had to work very short-handed. . . . October 9th. Our numbers are dwindling down fast. The few remaining old hands have to bear the whole brunt of the tremendous work of serving and firing the guns, on mud platforms, keeping ammunition clean, and keeping guns in action. In quite a few cases gunners a few days ago are now corporals and even sergeants. . . . The gunners carried out a most heavy and trying day's work under the worst conditions with determination and cheerfulness.

On October 12th many guns still lay temporarily abandoned<sup>6</sup> or out of action and unreplaced.

Another complication arose from the discovery that the 66th Division was not holding the front reported to be held, a condition upon which the barrage plan had been based. The 11th Australian Infantry Brigade, coming in on October 10th to relieve the 66th Division, found that the units in the line were uncertain where their own front lay. An officer of the 42nd Battalion, Lieutenant Fisher,<sup>7</sup> who, against the advice of several British officers, pressed on over Abraham Heights in daylight into the Ravebeek valley to ascertain the position before his troops arrived, came upon terrible scenes of which he has left a vivid description.

The slope . . . was littered with dead, both theirs and ours. I got to one pillbox to find it just a mass of dead, and so I passed on carefully to the one ahead. Here I found about fifty men alive, of the Manchesters. Never have I seen men so broken or demoralised. They

<sup>6</sup> See Vol. XII, plate 395.

<sup>7</sup> Lieut. W G Fisher, 42nd Bn Law student and tutor; of Brisbane; b Hørsham. Vic, 24 Aug, 1894. Killed in action, 5 April, 1918.

were huddled up close behind the box in the last stages of exhaustion and fear. Fritz had been sniping them off all day, and had accounted for fifty-seven that day—the dead and dying lay in piles. The wounded were numerous—unattended and weak, they groaned and moaned all over the place . . . some had been there four days already. . . . Finally the company came up—the men done after a fearful struggle through the mud and shell-holes, not to speak of the barrage which the Hun put down and which caught numbers. The position was obscure—a dark night—no line—demoralised Tommies—and no sign of the enemy. So I pushed out my platoon, ready for anything, and ran into the foe some 80 yards ahead. He put in a few bursts of rapid fire and then fled. We could not pursue as we had to establish the line, which was accomplished about an hour later. I spent the rest of the night in a shell-hole, up to my knees in mud and with the rain teeming down.

When October 11th dawned, the German sniping from all parts of the front, including "Augustus Wood,"<sup>8</sup> which the British line was supposed to fringe, was impudent in the extreme. At the wood Lieutenant Joseph<sup>9</sup> was shot, and farther south, on Passchendaele ridge, Lieutenant Drummond,<sup>10</sup> a popular officer of the 44th, had been killed.<sup>11</sup> The two battalions at once set to work and in a few hours had the enemy suppressed. The historian of the 210th R.I.R. notes that its opponents this day were "fresher and livelier."

By October 11th, when the 3rd Division ascertained that the line was practically the same as before the last attack, it was considered too late to alter the barrage orders for the whole front. All that seemed possible was to draw back for 350 yards the barrage for the 3rd Australian Division, and to quicken its rate of advance so that, in 500 yards, it would catch up the general line of the Second Army's barrage. It had been agreed that 100 yards in 8 minutes would be the proper pace for the infantry's progress throughout the attack of October 12. The 3rd Division would now have to advance the first 500 yards at twice that speed. If Generals Monash and Godley had had experience on the Somme, it is unlikely that they would have agreed to this arrangement. Had Godley really known the conditions of October 9th—the thinness of the barrage, the complete absence of smoke screen, the ineffectiveness of the bombardment, the exhaustion of the troops—how could he have hoped for success with deeper objectives

<sup>8</sup> See Vol VIII, plate at p. 206.

<sup>9</sup> Lieut. H. E. Joseph, 42nd Bn. Journalist; of Mackay; Q'land; b. Mackay. 26 May, 1891.

<sup>10</sup> Lieut. J. Drummond, 44th Bn. Railway fireman; of Merredin, W. Aust.; b. Donne, Perthshire, Scotland, 15 Jan., 1892. Killed in action, 10 Oct., 1917.

<sup>11</sup> The Germans were more distant here, except near the railway. A patrol under Lieut. J. F. Wood (Kaimkillenbun, Q'land), 42nd Bn., found the ridge empty for 300 yards.

than any since July 31st, shorter preparation, and with the infantry asked to advance at a pace unattempted in the dry weather of September? In the conditions of October 9th, although many of the Germans had barely resisted, the attacking troops had not been able to hold their gains. Nothing could justify a mere repetition of that result on October 12th. What then did Godley, Plumer, or Haig anticipate?

Haig's most intimate adviser, Brigadier-General Charteris, after visiting the battlefield on October 9th, had himself given up hope. He writes that, next day, Haig "sent for me about 10 to discuss things. He was still trying to find some grounds for hope that we might still win through this year. . . ." <sup>12</sup>

Two things seem certain—first, that the conditions on the battlefield were not known to the higher commanders as they should have been. It is true that Haig told the war correspondents on October 11th—<sup>13</sup>

It was simply the mud which defeated us on Tuesday. The men did splendidly to get through it as they did. But the Flanders mud, as you know, is not a new invention. It has a name in history—it has defeated other armies before this one. . . .

But, in spite of this generalisation, it is unbelievable that he was aware of the ineffectiveness of the immense effort of his artillery. Probably all these commanders expected something from the change of II Anzac's infantry. Above all, it seems certain that Godley, Plumer, and Haig believed that at least a chance of great strategic results was still within their reach. At the same interview Haig told the war correspondents that his army was now practically through the enemy's defences.

He has only flesh and blood against us, not blockhouses—they take a month to make.

<sup>12</sup> Charteris adds, "but there is none." He himself on Oct. 4 had urged Harington to push home that day's victory. "Now we have them on the run—get up the cavalry." His vividly written diary (*At G.H.Q.*) furnishes a most illuminating record of these critical days.

"Oct. 5. Unless we get fine weather all this month, there is now no chance of clearing the coast. With fine weather we may still do it. . . ."

"Oct. 8. Unless we have a very great success to-morrow, it is the end for this year so far as Flanders is concerned. With a great success to-morrow, and good weather for a few more weeks, we may still clear the coast and win the war before Christmas. It is not impossible, but it is pouring again to-day."

"Oct. 10. There is now no chance of complete success here this year. . . . Moving about close behind a battle . . . when one is all keyed up with the hope of great results, one passes without much thought all the horrible part of it. . . . But when one knows that the great purpose one has been working for has escaped, somehow one sees and thinks of nothing but the awfulness of it all. . . ."

<sup>13</sup> At an interview arranged by Major Hon. Neville Lytton. The words quoted were used in reply to a question whether the difficulties of the mud might be referred to in the newspapers. As on several other occasions, Haig favoured a frank statement.



The plans therefore held, General Godley (II Anzac) going for his deep objective, now involving an advance of about 3,000 yards,<sup>14</sup> and Generals Gough and Birdwood on either flank limiting theirs to the greatest effort which they considered practicable, which must, however, be consonant with their duty of supporting the main attack.

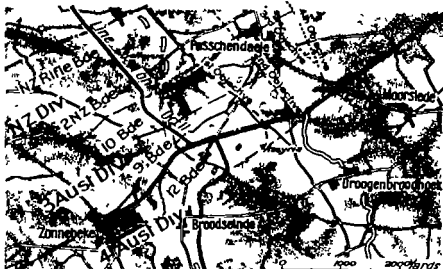
The capture of Passchendaele was to be effected in three phases. The first objective ("Red Line") was practically the second objective of the previous attack, 1,200 yards from the start. The second ("Blue"), half-a-mile farther on, was a jumping-off line for the assault upon the village. The final objective ("Green")<sup>15</sup> lay 400 yards beyond the village. The 3rd Australian Division would attack Passchendaele ridge and village, the New Zealand Division Bellevue Spur. The 3rd Division would move with its right (9th) brigade on the ridge, and its left (10th) in the Ravebeek valley, one battalion of each brigade being allotted by General Monash for the capture of each objective. The capture of Passchendaele village was part of the task of the 38th Battalion, of the left brigade. For mopping-up, the battalion was strengthened with an additional company. In case the village held out, a battalion of the right (9th) brigade was specially reserved by General Monash for enclosing it from the south, while the New Zealand Division also would hold troops ready to enclose it from the north. The attack would start at 5.25 a.m., and its general pace would be slow, with long halts on the successive objectives as follows:—

First (Red)  
6.37-8.25

Second (Blue)  
9.21-10.25

Third (Green Dotted)  
11.29-11.55

The final (Green) line would be reached at 12.11. On the right a brigade (12th) of I Anzac would advance in strength



<sup>14</sup> Since the 3rd Division had to start 350 yards farther back.

<sup>15</sup> Just beyond the village was an intermediate objective ("Green Dotted").

across the Keiberg at the railway and occupy successive positions on the flank of the first and second objectives, but would send out only a post towards the third.<sup>16</sup> The arrangements for bombardment and barrage were similar to those for the previous fighting, and practically the whole engineering force of both corps was concentrated upon preparing the artillery tracks and extending the duckboards.<sup>17</sup>

The two attacking brigades of the 3rd Division had spent the night of October 10th on the flats east of Ypres near Potijze. Tents, which were to have been provided, were not there, and the troops bivouacked in the wet grass, under such timber or old sheets of iron as they could find. On the night of the 11th Gough attempted to have the attack put off.

It poured with rain the previous afternoon (he writes), and in the evening I telephoned to Plumer to say that I thought the attack should be postponed. He said he would consult his corps commanders, and shortly after 8 o'clock<sup>18</sup> he called me up to say that they considered it best for the attack to be carried out. The only course for the Fifth Army was to follow suit. . . .

In the 3rd Australian Division the attack-brigades had begun their approach march about 6 p.m. The duckboards led much farther than when the 66th Division went in, but, soon after starting, both brigades found that their tracks were being accurately and persistently shelled, not only with high-explosive, but, at some points, with gas. In addition, other troops were met coming out, and the railway was being used by the infantry of I Anzac as well. As the 10th Brigade crossed the valley behind Abraham Heights, gas-shells were exploding on the windward side of the track, splashing the men with mud. Some put in their mouths the nozzles of their gas-masks, but the wind was fortunately high and few were gassed.

It is now known that this was part of an important German gas-shoot, entitled "Mondnacht." It had first been arranged for the night of October 2, but had been delayed. Even now, as some of the ammunition for shooting on the I Anzac front did not arrive, the shoot was incomplete.

<sup>16</sup> General Harrington wrote to General Monash: "I hope your right flank will be all right. I put a special reference to it into Army operations orders yesterday, and we saw General Birdwood specially about it. The orders issued are: 'The I Anzac Corps will advance simultaneously with II Anzac Corps and will be responsible for protecting the right flank of that corps. The point of junction between I and II Anzac will be the railway line at E 7c 9.7 [on the spur beyond the Keiberg]. Particular attention must be given to the high ground north and south of the Broubeek [beyond the Keiberg] . . . which must either be seized or kept under such fire as to prevent the right flank of II Anzac being interfered with therefrom.'"

<sup>17</sup> The approach for the 3rd Division's right brigade was now along and beside the railway (see Vol. XII, plate 407), and that for the left brigade "K" track over Abraham Heights.

<sup>18</sup> According to another account, Gough's request was made later.

At 1.30 a.m. rain showers began. By 2.30 it was raining lightly but steadily, by 3.30 fairly heavily. The infantry moved on through the pitchy dark in single file. In some battalions each man held on to the equipment of the man ahead of him; if touch was broken, those in front had to come back. The news that the line as reported by the 66th Division was not held had only just reached the incoming troops. Accordingly, in the right brigade (9th) the leading company commanders (Captains Jeffries and Gilder<sup>19</sup> of the 34th) stopped their men at the entrance to the Broodseinde railway cutting, and themselves went on to make sure that their column might not run into the enemy. At Keerselaarhoek cemetery they found the tape duly laid, and met the officer of the 36th Battalion who had laid it, and by 3 o'clock, the time set, the 34th was extended on its jumping-off position. But during the previous halt and afterwards, as it lay on the tape, the battalion was persistently shelled and suffered many casualties.<sup>20</sup> The 10th Brigade completed its assembly by 3.20,<sup>21</sup> the 37th, 38th, and 40th lying in that order from front to rear. The men pulled their waterproof sheets over their heads for shelter against the rain, and slept. But they, too, were severely shelled and suffered considerable loss.

At 4.20 the rain ceased, and at 5.25, when the British barrage descended, a whitish streak on the eastern horizon was lighting the low, dun-coloured, fleeting scud overhead and the dull, green and brown moorland below. Despite its imposing sound, the barrage, as on October 9th, afforded no screen and only light protection; all day it was possible to see clearly through it, and the attacking troops had difficulty in judging whether the scattered shells that burst fitfully around them were their own or the enemy's. Four hours later spectators lining the ridges in rear, and watching for the

<sup>19</sup> Capt. T. G. Gilder, M.C.; 34th Bn. Law student; of Pymble, N.S.W.; b. Chatswood, N.S.W., 21 Aug., 1894.

<sup>20</sup> The first shell killed three signallers. Lieut. A. L. Watson (Eastwood, N.S.W.), signal officer of the 34th, a brave and enterprising leader, who also was at the head of the column, was severely wounded, and all his staff hit, after establishing a forward command post. Lieut. T. F. Bruce (Sydney), 36th Bn., also was killed. Colonel Milne (36th), supervising the assembly, was knocked down by a shell, but continued to command. Chaplain C. Murphy (Geraldton, W. Aust., and Sydney) was wounded.

<sup>21</sup> Its jumping-off line was at Dab Trench (Flanders I Line), which it had taken on Oct. 4. As the old wire-entanglement of this line was still inconveniently thick, Major Giblin, commanding on the spot, arranged for the 40th Battalion to assemble on the left of its sector, in the sunken Nieuwemolen-Laamkeek road, and to extend when the advance began.

barrage to pass up the Passchendaele heights, were similarly perplexed: it was impossible to believe that the casual shelling there, which presently ceased, represented the passing of the British barrage over the heights. "We made no attempt to conform to it," says the history of the 40th Battalion. "There was really nothing to conform to. The artillery had been unable to do the impossible. . . ." But were any of the higher commanders aware that in these operations their infantry attacked virtually without protection?

Only one Australian division, the 3rd, was wholly employed in this day's offensive. But that division was to capture Passchendaele, and, in spite of the depressing conditions, it was eager to achieve the distinction of doing so. One unit carried an Australian flag, to be planted in Passchendaele, and, although officers and men in general were not enthusiastic concerning such "stunts," the Commander-in-Chief had been informed, and had told General Monash that, when this flag was planted, the news would be immediately cabled to Australia. Some keen spirits looked on the operation simply as a dash for Passchendaele. One young company commander of Monash's reserve battalion, the 33rd, in face of a strict prohibition, led on his company as soon as the barrage fell.

Starting from a line 350 yards in rear of the general alignment, the 3rd Division was out of touch with its neighbours from the outset. The heavy shelling on the tapes had made orderly disposition there almost impossible, and as German machine-guns, undisturbed by the barrage, now opened immediately, no opportunity offered of restoring proper formation. The 9th Brigade went forward in the utmost confusion;<sup>22</sup> and as, even on the ridge, the mud was difficult, the hope, if there ever was



*Intended direction of advance—broken arrow.  
Black arrow shows actual tendency.*

<sup>22</sup> "Terrible mix-up," reported Capt. Dixon (35th Bn.) at 6.40 a.m., "Great confusion" was the description given by Capt. Carr.

one, of catching up the quick barrage vanished. The 9th Brigade's intended direction lay not along the ridge and the Passchendaele road, but diagonally across them, and parallel to the railway, which most of the brigade could not see. As the jumping-off line was practically at right angles to the ridge, the brigade tended to advance along the heights.

The machine-gun fire at the start came, on the 9th Brigade's right, from the ruined house near Defy Crossing; on its centre, from "Hillside Farm"; and, on its left, from Augustus Wood. The pillbox opposite the centre was supported from the rear by a trench in which were Germans with machine-guns, and here occurred a delay which threatened to wreck the whole attack. It was not until an hour after programme time that these places were rushed by the neighbouring portion of the line under Captains Carr<sup>23</sup> and Dixon<sup>24</sup> of the 35th Battalion. The trench contained 35 Germans and 4 machine-guns. Part of the line was also held up by a pillbox close to the Passchendaele road near the highest point of the ridge. Here there was practically no shelter for the attack, but Captain Jeffries of the 34th managed to organise a party, with Sergeant Bruce<sup>25</sup> and another N.C.O., and a dozen men, and, outflanking it, charged the place from the rear, capturing 25 Germans and 2 machine-guns.

These actions set free the advance. The pillbox captured by Jeffries being not far short of the first objective, the 34th dug in there. Great loss had been incurred; the 34th had only three officers then left, and there were wide gaps in the line. The right flank had swung far away from the railway, along which the 4th Division was attacking;<sup>26</sup> but on the left Captain Gilder (34th)<sup>27</sup> found the 10th Brigade digging in slightly to his left rear under Captain Latchford (38th), and fell back seventy yards to join it.

In the 10th Brigade the right and centre of the leading battalion (37th) had met strong machine-gun fire from Augustus Wood<sup>28</sup> within a few moments of the start, and

<sup>23</sup> Major H. V. Carr, 35th Bn. Civil servant; of Croydon, N.S.W.; b. Parramatta, N.S.W., 11 June, 1883.

<sup>24</sup> Capt. R. D. Dixon, D.S.O.; 35th Bn. Electrical engineer; of Moss Vale, N.S.W.; b. Burwood, N.S.W., 7 Dec, 1874.

<sup>25</sup> Lieut. J. Bruce, M.C., D.C.M.; 34th Bn. Miner; of Pelaw Main, N.S.W.; b. Oxtou, Berwick, Scotland, 5 Nov., 1879. Killed in action, 17 July, 1918.

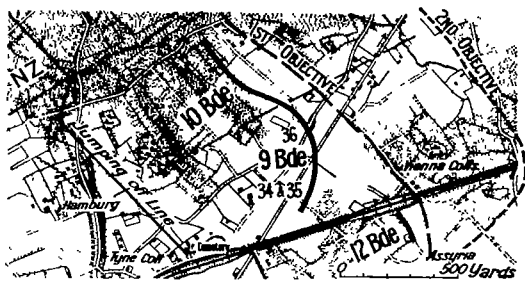
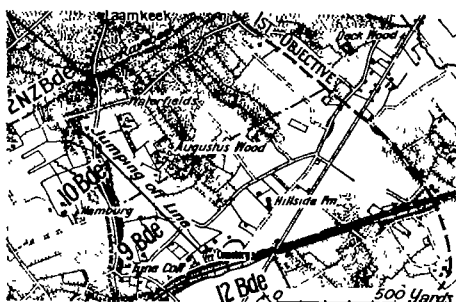
<sup>26</sup> See Vol. XII, plate 401.

<sup>27</sup> He had been wounded by a machine-gun bullet, but was carrying on.

<sup>28</sup> Opposite the centre was a copse separate from the main wood, but generally known by the same name.

also sniping shots from a pillbox, "Waterfields," in the Ravebeek bog on the left. This fire forced the troops to advance by hopping from shell-hole to shell-hole, and the 40th and 38th here joined the front line. From that time to the end of the action, the three battalions were intermingled. In the centre Lieutenant Garrard (40th) with a mixed party moved past the wood, and then, entering it from the rear, quickly brought about the capture of this slough of broken stumps and undergrowth.<sup>29</sup> On the left men working from shell-hole to shell-hole, and then attacking with bombs, seized Waterfields.

Although the fire from both places had been quickly overcome, it had caused very severe casualties.<sup>30</sup> From this stage onwards, as the brigade in scattered parties advanced along the slope, it became the target for an ever-increasing fire from the Bellevue Spur past which its left had to brush. This spur lay in front of the New Zealand Division, but, as the German supports there were concentrating their attention on the Australians passing along the valley, it was clear that the New Zealanders had been held up. The 10th Brigade's advance became possible only by



<sup>29</sup> Lieut. Garrard's party took a pillbox and 20 prisoners.

<sup>30</sup> Among the killed were Sergeant Lewis McGee (who received the Victoria Cross for his work on Oct. 4), and Lieuts. J. Roadknight (37th), K. E. D. Marshall (38th), and C. F. Sharland (40th). Capt. H. Southby (39th) was wounded, and later he and the stretcher-bearers who were carrying him out were killed by shell-fire. Lieut. T. C. Robinson (38th) was wounded, and then killed as he went to the rear. (Roadknight belonged to Sale, Vic.; Marshall to Sydney; Sharland to Hobart. Southby to Bendigo, Vic.; Robinson to Preston, Vic.)

small parties working from shell-hole to shell-hole. Somewhat short of the first objective a fold of the main ridge between two swamps offered possible ground for digging in. Some sort of excavation, marked on the maps as an old trench, was traceable among the shell-holes. Here most of the parties stopped, and Major Giblin of the 40th, taking charge, eventually organised them into a fairly definite line. Both brigades were thus in the neighbourhood of their first objective.

The advance to the second objective was to begin at 8.25. The low clouds had opened, and high fleecy cirrus with patches of blue were widening overhead. The sun had come out.<sup>81</sup> On the height, the 9th Brigade had been so late in reaching the first objective that, while most of the 34th Battalion dug in, the 35th, allotted for the second phase, moved straight on. Standing on the Passchendaele road, Captains Carr and Dixon endeavoured to decide where the barrage then was; at first Carr thought it might be behind them, but they finally decided that it was well ahead.<sup>82</sup> The confusion at the start had split the brigade into mixed parties of all battalions, and many of the 34th went on with the 35th, the main body of which, about 100 in all, now advanced along the south-eastern side of the ridge in order to catch up the barrage.

The hour was probably a little before that for the second advance. A German machine-gun in the gap between the brigade's right and the railway immediately opened with deadly effect. Major Buchanan<sup>83</sup> (36th), the senior forward officer of the brigade, was killed. At this critical juncture Captain Jeffries (34th), again accompanied by Sergeant Bruce, led out a few men from the first objective and made for the gun. It was shooting in short bursts, and he was able to work up fairly close. Seizing a moment when it was firing to the north, he and his men rushed at it from the west. It was switched round, killing him, and sending his men to ground. But when its fire eased they worked round it, rushed the position, and seized 25 Germans and 2 machine-guns. This gallant and effective action<sup>84</sup> removed the chief danger to the advance along the crest, but as soon as the 35th crossed

<sup>81</sup> These details are from the Official War Correspondent's diary.

<sup>82</sup> Major Giblin of the 10th Brigade (the present Ritchie Professor of Economics in Melbourne University, and acting Commonwealth Statistician) reported: "Even in full daylight, with careful observation, I was unable to place it with certainty."

<sup>83</sup> Major J. B. Buchanan. 36th Bn. Clerk; of Burwood, N.S.W.; b. Randwick, N.S.W., 23 June, 1894. Killed in action, 12 Oct., 1917.

<sup>84</sup> Capt. Jeffries was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross

to the eastern side of the hill it became the target of a number of field and heavy guns which, from hedges and other cover in various parts of the landscape, fired over open sights. After passing a copse on its right, the 35th settled down on what its officers took to be the second objective, although on the extreme right they were actually short of the first. Captain Carr, now senior officer on the spot, reported:

8.35. On objective, with about 100, with Captain Dixon and three officers. Casualties 25 or 30 per cent. Captain Cadell,<sup>36</sup> Lieuts. Main<sup>38</sup> and Day<sup>37</sup> reported killed, Lieutenants Horne,<sup>38</sup> Mears,<sup>39</sup> Henry<sup>40</sup> wounded. Prisoners sent back 400-500. Contact on flanks uncertain. Being heavily shelled.

Three posts were established under surviving officers—right, Lieutenant D'Arcy;<sup>41</sup> centre, Lieutenant Adams;<sup>42</sup> left, Lieutenant Wyndham.<sup>43</sup> In this brigade the battalion for the final objective was the 36th, and a report came along that it had gone through. Actually, it had advanced with the 35th, but, on the left, penetrated to the second objective, which had been reconnoitred during the previous halt by the commander of its left company, Captain Goldrick.<sup>44</sup> As no other battalion was there, he



<sup>36</sup> Capt. H. C. D. Cadell, M.C.; 35th Bn. Electrical engineer; of Newcastle, N.S.W.; b. Gayndah, Q'land, 17 May, 1876. Killed in action, 12 Oct., 1917.

<sup>38</sup> Lieut. C. T. Main, 35th Bn. Chemist, of North Adelaide; b. North Adelaide, 8 Nov., 1886. Killed in action, 12 Oct., 1917.

<sup>37</sup> Lieut. K. M. Day, 35th Bn. Stock and station agent; of Molong, N.S.W.; b. Parkes, N.S.W., 1887. Killed in action, 12 Oct., 1917.

<sup>38</sup> Lieut. F. Horne, 35th Bn. Grocer; of Parramatta, N.S.W.; b. London, 7 June, 1885.

<sup>39</sup> Lieut. C. K. Mears, 35th Bn. Electrician; of Merewether, N.S.W.; b. Wickham, N.S.W., 5 May, 1898.

<sup>40</sup> Lieut. C. J. Henry, 35th Bn. Watchmaker's apprentice; of Hamilton, N.S.W.; b. Carrington, N.S.W., 17 Nov., 1897.

<sup>41</sup> Lieut. N. B. D'Arcy, M.C.; 35th Bn. Clerk; of Albury, N.S.W.; b. Wilcannia, N.S.W., 24 Sept., 1892.

<sup>42</sup> Lieut. J. F. Adams, 35th Bn. Chief steward; of Melbourne; b. Newmarket, Flintshire, North Wales, 1888. Killed in action, 12 Oct., 1917.

<sup>43</sup> Lieut. H. S. Wyndham, 9th M.G. Coy. Clerk; of Manly, N.S.W.; b. East Matland, N.S.W., 11 Sept., 1895.

<sup>44</sup> Major R. A. Goldrick, M.C.; 33rd Bn. Bank clerk; of Parramatta, N.S.W.; b. Woollahra, N.S.W., 4 March, 1890. (He went up the road towards Passchendaele. The barrage, he said afterwards was no hindrance to him, although he left the line lying as close to it as possible "or where they thought it was." He was unable to detect the intensification of the barrage for the second phase, but led his men forward at the proper hour.)



now established the line with its left on the road 600 yards from the church, about the point reached by the 66th Division's troops on October 9th.<sup>45</sup> From the direction of the church, which lay straight down the highway, no fire came. Two Germans ran up the road and surrendered. South-east of the village, along the Moorslede road, were Germans who seemed "very windy," and near that road two 5.9-inch howitzers began to blaze at the troops digging in.

In the 10th Brigade's line near the first objective in the Ravebeek valley, Major Giblin, finding that, when the last parties appeared to have struggled up, he had only 100-150 men,<sup>46</sup> decided to hold the troops there until reinforcements or further instructions could be obtained from the rear. At 8.40 he sent a message reporting the position and stating that he had not enough men to continue the advance. Unknown to him, however, at least one party of the 10th Brigade, having no distinguishable barrage to follow, had pushed straight for Passchendaele. It comprised about twenty men, chiefly of the 38th, and, advancing by some means up the Ravebeek gully, it met no opposition until it climbed on a spur jutting into the end of the valley. Here, at "Crest Farm," on the outskirts of Passchendaele, a large pillbox confronted the party; but the inmates and other Germans near by, some twenty in all, surrendered at once and were sent back as prisoners. On the Bellevue-Meetcheele spur Germans could be seen withdrawing in numbers, the mere news of the attack have apparently been enough to set these supports in retreat.<sup>47</sup> The Australian party went straight on to Passchendaele church, and found no Germans at or near it. As, however,

<sup>45</sup> In front of the position, Goldrick and Lieut. E. H. Fleiter (39th) found, hidden in a shellhole, two men of the 66th Division. One had a broken arm, the other trench-feet. They took the Australians at first for Germans. When reassured, "We knew the Australians would come," they said. "We prayed hard."

<sup>46</sup> Eventually he had probably 200. Among the officers who are stated in various messages or later reports to have been at or near this position are Captains F. C. Heberle (37th), R. E. Trebilcock and E. W. Latchford (38th), and A. T. Paterson (39th), and Lieuts. J. A. Mouchemore and N. G. McNicol (37th), P. C. Herring and F. J. Baxter (38th), E. H. Fleiter (39th), W. L. Garrard, G. L. McIntyre, L. K. Swann, and A. R. Mills (40th). Captains R. V. J. Stubbs (37th) and J. D. W. Chisholm (40th) were wounded at or near the position. Lieuts. E. T. Stevens and J. A. McMichael (37th) and C. Matthews (38th) were killed, probably by sniping from Bellevue Spur. (Heberle belonged to Elsternwick, Vic.; Trebilcock to Kerang, Vic.; Latchford to Ascot Vale and Armadale, Vic.; Paterson to East Malvern, Vic.; Mouchemore to Williamstown, Vic.; McNicol to Gordon and Caulfield, Vic.; Herring to Shepparton, Vic.; Baxter, who died on 19 June, 1921, to Miamia and Leichardt, Vic.; Fleiter to Albert Park, Vic.; Garrard to Launceston, Tas.; McIntyre to Hobart; Swann to Keyneton, S. Aust.; Mills to Launceston, Tas.; Stubbs to Shepparton, Vic.; Chisholm to Hobart; Stevens to Windsor, Vic.; McMichael to Toorak, Vic.; Matthews to Melbourne.)

<sup>47</sup> They were at first mistaken for New Zealanders advancing.

there was also no sign of their own side, they there turned back and, without any trouble, withdrew to the left flank of the 9th Brigade. As they did so, they observed that on the Meetcheele spur the Germans had rallied and were trooping forward again, while at Crest Farm the pillbox which the party had taken had been reoccupied by the enemy, and several machine-guns were firing from it.<sup>48</sup>

The 9th Brigade had taken its second objective and the 10th Brigade its first, but the position of the officers in charge of these advanced lines was full of anxiety. On the eastern slope Captain Carr (35th Bn.), the senior officer in this part of the 9th Brigade's front, could see the 4th Division somewhat ahead of his right, and by 10.55 he had discovered that the 36th was on his left, but farther left the 10th Brigade was far behind on the first objective. The German guns ahead were sniping with dreadful accuracy. Carr, like Giblin on the western slope, sent back for instructions: "What am I to do?"

The troops with Giblin had early realised that something had gone wrong with the New Zealanders' attack. The divisions had never been in touch, and as fire from Bellevue Spur, the New Zealanders' first objective, was wrecking the 10th Brigade's attack, Captain Latchford (38th) had sent Lieutenant McKenzie<sup>49</sup> to suppress it. McKenzie and his party were never seen again; but Lieutenants Grant and Chamberlain<sup>50</sup> of the 40th, of their own accord, led a small party over the Ravebeek by a road-crossing—the one practicable route—towards the New Zealand objective. Working along the road, they captured one pillbox. Attempting to rush two other positions, Grant was killed, but the rest of the party under Chamberlain and a New Zealand officer,<sup>51</sup> who had penetrated along the same route, took these places—the garrisons, more than 60 in all, were short of ammunition.

<sup>48</sup> These details are from an account by Sergeant G. A. Charlesworth (Sprent, Tas.), who was one of the party.

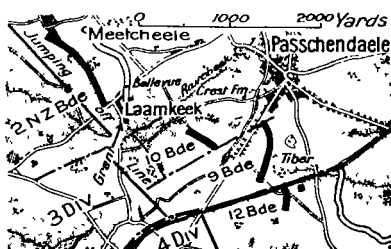
<sup>49</sup> Lieut. D. McKenzie, 38th Bn. Labourer; of Kerang, Vic.; b. Kerang, 1889. Killed in action, 12 Oct., 1917.

<sup>50</sup> Lieut. H. Chamberlain, 40th Bn. Clergyman; of Woodbridge, Tas., and Newfields, Moira, Leics., Eng.; b. Castle Gresley, Derbyshire, Eng., 16 June, 1889. Died of wounds, 30 March, 1918.

<sup>51</sup> Lieut. A. R. Cockerell, D.S.O.; 1st Bn., Otago Regt. Railway employee; of Oamaru, N.Z.; b. Macrae's Flat, Otago, N.Z., 21 Nov., 1891.

Here Lieutenant Munday<sup>52</sup> (38th) came up, but, as there was no field of fire, he and Chamberlain returned. From the lower dugout, which gave a better view, Munday endeavoured to suppress the snipers higher up the ridge. Chamberlain made his way back to his battalion.

The effort to keep down the fire from Bellevue was hopeless. All who could see this spur now observed Germans pouring along it in a constant stream, filling trenches, reinforcing pillboxes, trickling down to some near the Ravebeek well behind the flank of the 10th Brigade. A few Australians who had crossed the Ravebeek nearer Passchendaele were observed making back through the mud. Giblin saw a man in front of him killed by a shot from the rear. Anxiously looking back, his troops marked the Germans still holding even the farthest end of the Bellevue Spur. Some New Zealanders were seen once to make



a sort of a scattered advance, and it disappeared—it was difficult to see what had happened but it was clear they were not through. . . .

Ahead, at Crest Farm, machine-guns were becoming more active. At 1.30 Giblin had received no reply to his message sent at 8.40. The position of the 9th Brigade was not precisely known to him, but increasing numbers of its men were seen retiring.

Word of the true situation reached headquarters slowly. As on the 9th, the first news was all encouraging. General Monash in the Ypres ramparts heard shortly after 7 that both brigades were "well away"; by 8.26 he had ample evidence that the first objective was taken. At 9.25 the intelligence officer examining prisoners (Lieutenant Cutlack<sup>53</sup>) reported having heard from wounded men that the second objective had been reached.<sup>54</sup> At 10.28 headquarters was informed of the statement of a wounded man, that the 38th Battalion (for the third objective) had gone through. A

<sup>52</sup> Lieut. (temp. Capt.) J. J. Munday, 38th Bn. Accountant; of Geelong, Vic.; b. Geelong, 7 July, 1887.

<sup>53</sup> Capt. F. M. Cutlack, R.F.A. Afterwards Assistant Official War Correspondent with A.I.F., 1918/19. Journalist; of Renmark, S. Aust., and Sydney; b. Lancing, Sussex, Eng., 30 Sept., 1886.

<sup>54</sup> Monash noted this, "incredible as it is not time yet." But, as regards a few men, it was probably true.

further report that Australians had been seen at Crest Farm, although quickly contradicted,<sup>55</sup> confirmed Monash's impression that his division was succeeding. Concerning the New Zealand brigade on his left, however, there was no word until, at 10.50, there arrived the tragic information that the New Zealand Division was stopped by the enemy along its entire front. Monash had already heard at 9.55 that his 10th Brigade was held up by fire from Bellevue Spur. Believing that his division was still advancing, he asked that every gun that the New Zealand Division could spare should be turned upon that ridge to suppress the fire. Meanwhile, he would order the reserve (39th) battalion of the 10th Brigade to be ready to assist in holding the ground already won. The reserve battalion (33rd) of the 9th Brigade he was still keeping back to assist in the capture of Passchendaele.

Shortly after noon news of the true situation arrived. Lieutenant Jackson<sup>56</sup> of the 40th Battalion had established at Waterfields pillbox near the Ravebeek a forward report-centre from which a series of messages, admirably accurate, was flashed by lamp to the headquarters of Lieutenant-Colonel Lord<sup>57</sup> (40th).<sup>58</sup> Thus Brigadier-General McNicoll (10th Brigade) was able to inform Monash of the precise position of Giblin's line. He added that the situation was very serious and the casualties very heavy. At the same time from the front line of the 9th Brigade arrived a pigeon message, sent by Captain Gadd<sup>59</sup> of the 36th:

We are on Blue Line (second objective) with composite force all three battalions, both flanks in air.

The New Zealand Division was to make a second attempt at 3 p.m., and Monash was of opinion that from the 9th Brigade, well forward on the ridge, patrols might still work northwards around Crest Farm. His reserve, the 33rd Battalion (9th Brigade), was accordingly ordered to attempt this at 4.30, the 10th Brigade's forward line being meanwhile reinforced by its own reserve, the 39th Battalion.

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<sup>55</sup> It was probably true, nevertheless.

<sup>56</sup> Lieut. B. J. Jackson, M.C.; 40th Bn. School teacher; of Sheffield, Tas.; b. West Kentish, Tas., 2 March, 1895.

<sup>57</sup> Col. J. E. C. Lord, C.M.G., D.S.O., V.D. Commanded 40th Bn., 1916/19 Commissioner of Police, Tasmania, 1906/40; of Sandy Bay, Tas., b. Brighton, Tas., 8 May, 1870.

<sup>58</sup> A valuable summary of the situation, sent at 10.20 by Captain Trebilcock of the 38th, in Giblin's line, was also received by Lieut.-Col. R. O. Henderson of the 39th.

<sup>59</sup> Capt. R. Gadd, 36th Bn. Accountant; of Coogee, N.S.W.; b. Manchester, Eng., 13 Jan., 1893.

These orders went out, but none of them were fulfilled. The New Zealand Division had been defeated by obstacles which no hastily renewed bombardment could have overcome. No infantry in the world could have crossed the Ravebeek mud, penetrated the dense wire, and attacked the crowded pillboxes of Bellevue with the assistance of a barrage which did not even screen the advance. No blame can attach to the artillery. Its commander, according to the New Zealand official history, had reported on the previous day that his guns might be unable to give effective support. This magnificent division, which lost nearly 3,000 men, had been held up in almost exactly the same position as the 49th three days before—the left brigade penetrating half-way to the first objective, the right stopped almost at the start. The Germans were reinforcing. The New Zealand battalion commanders knew that their men had no chance of succeeding by renewed attack, and the order was eventually cancelled.

As for the Australians, of the two battalions that Monash had now ordered to participate, the 39th had already to a large extent been involved in the fighting, and the 33rd, endeavouring to reach its position of readiness for outflanking Passchendaele, had suffered great loss.<sup>60</sup> By the time when Lieutenant-Colonels Henderson<sup>61</sup> and Morshead attempted to carry out Monash's orders, they found that the attacking force of both brigades was back almost at its starting point. What had happened was as follows.

Neither Major Giblin near the Ravebeek nor Captain Carr on the ridge had received a reply to their messages sent several hours earlier. The 9th Brigade's line was still being battered by German guns. Captain Gadd (36th), whose troops were being wiped out, informed Captain Carr (35th) that Lieutenant-Colonel Milne (36th) had now come forward to Hillside Farm. Carr accordingly sent Captain Dixon with Gadd to explain to Milne the desperate nature of their situation. Milne said that he would try to get their troops relieved after dark, but till relief they must hold on.

<sup>60</sup> No less than six of its officers were killed or mortally wounded—Captain W. F. Hinton, in command forward, Lieuts. L. R. Brownlow, T. A. Armstrong, A. G. Kilpatrick, W. Rees-Reynolds, N. F. Goble. (Hinton belonged to Wagga Wagga, N.S.W.; Brownlow to Marrickville, N.S.W.; Armstrong to Mackay, Q'land; Kilpatrick to Walcha, N.S.W.; Rees-Reynolds to Sydney; Goble to Richmond, Vic.)

<sup>61</sup> Lieut.-Col. R. O. Henderson, D.S.O. Commanded 39th Bn., 1917/18. Merchant; of Bendigo, Vic.; b Bendigo, 26 July, 1875. Killed in action, 29 Sept., 1918.

Meanwhile, however, the German artillery was annihilating some parts of their line. All the leaders of Carr's three posts were out of action.<sup>62</sup> Of the remaining officers of the 36th, Major Buchanan and Lieutenant Putney<sup>63</sup> had been killed, and Captain Goldrick wounded.<sup>64</sup> At 3 o'clock rain began to fall steadily. At 3.15 Gadd, though agreeing with Carr that to hold on meant annihilation, refused, in view of his colonel's orders, to retire. Carr consented to wait while Gadd again sent word to Milne; Carr himself at 12.30 had sent Dixon to the headquarters of the 35th back at "Seine," from which no word had been received all day. At 3.45, no reply having come from Milne, and Dixon not having returned,<sup>65</sup> Gadd agreed to withdraw and Carr sent along the line a note: "The 35th Battalion will retire."

When visiting Gadd, Carr had warned the troops of the probable order to withdraw, and he now saw that the left had already begun to retire. He told men whom he passed to get back as fast as they could to the 34th Battalion (which he believed to be on the first objective). Captain Gordon<sup>66</sup> (36th), strongly dissatisfied with this order, went straight to Colonel Milne, urged that the forward position was tenable, and, with Milne and Major Hawkey,<sup>67</sup> rushed out to stop the withdrawal. But it was then too late. The 34th was not, as Carr believed, on the first objective. The commander of its line, Captain Richardson,<sup>68</sup> on hearing of the extreme weakness of the force at the second objective, had reinforced it. He and his only remaining officer<sup>69</sup> had been killed, and the first objective now lay empty. The retiring troops, being without orders as to the position to be taken up, streamed back past Milne's headquarters. All that Hawkey,

<sup>62</sup> Lieut. Adams had been killed, and D'Arcy and Wyndham wounded.

<sup>63</sup> Lieut. F. W. Putney, 36th Bn. Hairdresser; of Carrington, N.S.W.; b Coolah, N.S.W., 1880. Killed in action, 12 Oct., 1917.

<sup>64</sup> Farther back Lieut. S. Cook had been killed, and Lieuts. W. Wand and H. R. Mailer wounded, the former mortally. (Cook belonged to Sydney, Wand to Singleton, N.S.W.; Mailer to Trundle, N.S.W.)

<sup>65</sup> He had been kept at 35th Bn. headquarters awaiting the arrival of an order from brigade headquarters concerning the projected operation by the reserve battalion.

<sup>66</sup> Capt. W. J. Gordon, M.C.; 33rd Bn. Public servant; of Rose Bay, N.S.W.; b. Newcastle, N.S.W., 1 June, 1888.

<sup>67</sup> Lieut.-Col. J. M. Hawkey, M.C.; 36th Bn. Member of Aust. Permanent Forces; of Sydney, b. Camden Park, Camden, N.S.W., 12 Oct., 1877.

<sup>68</sup> Capt. J. W. Richardson, 34th Bn. Tanner; of Longueville, N.S.W., b. Longueville, 11 July, 1891. Killed in action, 12 Oct., 1917.

<sup>69</sup> Lieut. J. C. Burges. Lieuts. B. G. McKenzie and J. A. Longworth had been killed while organising on the first objective. (Burges and McKenzie and Longworth all belonged to East Maitland, N.S.W.)

Gordon, Gadd, and others could then do was to lead a fraction of them forward again to the first objective, where they remained during the night.<sup>70</sup>

In the 10th Brigade's line Major Giblin had long before come to the same resolution as Carr, but had put it into action by steps as prudent as those adopted in the 9th Brigade were the reverse. His decision had been made shortly after noon, when, still without any communication from headquarters, he observed the constant dribbling of Germans behind his left flank. After consulting Captain Paterson (39th) and other officers, he resolved upon withdrawal, but at least an hour was spent in ensuring that all men were informed of the order, and the troops were then sent off in fours and fives, the first batch consisting of two officers and a few men who were ordered to take up a position at the morning's jumping-off line and to ensure that the retiring troops dug in there. The Germans followed the retirement with "whizz-bang" shells, but by 3.30 it had been completed with slight loss.

The 3rd Division was thus back almost to its starting point. It remains to tell how its right flank had been supported by I Anzac. The 4th Division attacked with two battalions of the 12th Brigade, the 47th (Queensland) to seize the first objective—the neck of the Keiberg at the railway cutting; the 48th (South and Western Australia) to throw out posts beyond this to the second objective, at the bottom of the next valley. If the 3rd Division reached its final objective, another post was to be stationed on the Moorslede height beyond.

As on October 9th, when at zero hour the two battalions<sup>71</sup> advanced south of the railway, there was no sign of troops advancing north of it. As before, the troops south of the railway were shot at by the German post at the cement dump.

<sup>70</sup> Captain Dixon with Captain J. G. Paterson (Manly, N.S.W.), adjutant of the 35th, went up to organise the 35th there but could find none of its men. When eventually re-formed, the remnant of the 35th was temporarily attached, as a company, to the 33rd.

<sup>71</sup> The exposed battalion headquarters on Broodseinde Ridge was shelled, as on the 9th, and, before the start, 27 men of the 47th Battalion were killed there and 12 wounded, among them some of the best of the battalion. Lieut. H. Q. Ridley (Broomehill, W. Aust., and Newcastle-on-Tyne, Eng.), 48th Bn., also was killed about this time.

This now lay almost immediately on the left of their jumping-off tape, and part of the rear battalion (48th) at once lined the railway and kept down the fire while the remainder swept on.<sup>72</sup> The German post in Decoy Wood was bombed and taken. The garrison of the dugouts in the Keiberg cutting opened fire with rifles, but did not use its machine-guns, and was quickly captured. Two officers of the 12th Machine Gun Company, Lieutenants Upton and East,<sup>73</sup> with part of their sections set up their guns above the cutting, close behind the foremost infantry.<sup>74</sup> The 47th and 48th, by this time intermingled, took up a line across the neck of the Keiberg. On the right, Germans at "Assyria," after shooting for some time from the windows, fled, and in spite of very severe casualties the 12th Brigade secured the first objective.<sup>75</sup>

The troops looking across the next gully now saw a company of Germans rush from "Tiber Copse," 350 yards to the north-east, to line the railway embankment across the gully before Moorslede, and open fire on the Australian right. The Australians at the cutting had them directly enfiladed, and, opening fire, swept the enemy away. It was at this stage that the right of the 3rd Division appeared north of the railway, and, in the teeth of very heavy fire from right and left fronts, advanced to a position slightly behind the left of the 4th. The party of the 48th that had been lining the railway was thus released, and was sent to reinforce the troops ahead.

At the same time the hour (8.25 a.m.) arrived for the second stage of the attack. The left of the 48th did not move, the 3rd Division being still considerably behind it. East of the cutting the fire from Vienna Cottages was severe, and the forward end of the cutting was impassable. Captain Hilary,<sup>76</sup> commander of the support company of the

<sup>72</sup> Lieut. W. H. Buncombe (Marrickville and Coogee, N.S.W.) of the 47th was killed at this stage.

<sup>73</sup> Lieut. J. T. East, 12th M.G. Coy. Farm hand; of Elaine, Vic.; b. Elaine, 9 June, 1890. Killed in action, 12 Oct., 1917.

<sup>74</sup> Upton was to have taken two guns to Decoy Wood, and East two to the cutting. They advanced together until their men were too few to carry the guns. They then left two guns and pressed on with the other two. Finding the Decoy Wood position to be a swamp and without field of fire, they decided to go on together to the cutting, and there they set up the guns within twenty yards of one another.

<sup>75</sup> It is recorded that, by a fine effort, hot cocoa and stew were brought to the 47th on this objective by 8 a.m.

<sup>76</sup> Capt. W. F. Cranswick (served under professional name of Wilfred Hilary), 48th Bn. Actor; of Melbourne; b. Kimberley, S. Africa, 10 Jan., 1882.



48th behind the Keiberg, met the officer commanding the 3rd Division's flank, who told him that it could advance no farther and would dig in there. In the 48th's centre Captain Carter<sup>77</sup> decided not to move until the left advanced; but Captain Whittington<sup>78</sup> led forward the right, captured a number of Germans, who did not attempt to resist, and, with eighteen men, reached what he believed to be his objective. Later, to the left, about 100 of the 3rd Division were seen advancing to their second objective far along the ridge.



In the afternoon German troops were observed moving up all roads visible to the south-east. The enemy artillery opened a bombardment extending deep behind the Australian front, and at 3 o'clock German infantry, in impressively well-ordered waves, came over the rise ahead of the 4th Division. The target was easy, and Australian riflemen and machine-gunners quickly broke up the attack. But Captain Whittington's isolated post was outflanked. Four of his messengers had been shot after going fifty yards. He now sent back his men, and, having seen them go, was following, when he was wounded. He was afterwards captured.

At 4 o'clock a stronger but less orderly counter-attack issued from the same front. The 4th Division's posts fired the S.O.S. signal, but no barrage fell on the advancing enemy.<sup>79</sup> Rifle ammunition, however, had been brought up by carrying parties of the 45th Battalion, and the posts had

<sup>77</sup> Capt. L. L. Carter, M.C.; 48th Bn. Theological student; of West Perth, W. Aust., b. Newport, Vic., 6 Oct., 1890.

<sup>78</sup> Capt. L. A. Whittington, 48th Bn. Barrister and solicitor, of Hyde Park, S. Aust., b. Hyde Park, 16 Sept., 1888.

<sup>79</sup> Reports from the 3rd Division, which believed its own right to be on the second objective, had made it appear that the 4th Division was there also. Any barrage thrown fell, therefore, too far eastward.

no intention of withdrawing, when there occurred the retirement of the 3rd Division from Passchendaele Ridge. As it was out of the question for the 4th Division to remain alone on the Keiberg, its officers gave the order to fall back. The railway line was the only practicable route, and almost the whole of the division's advanced line trooped back along it,<sup>80</sup> the actual withdrawal being completed without great loss. The Germans followed as far as the Keiberg, and one or two Australian posts which had not retired,<sup>81</sup> including that in Decoy Wood, were captured. Like Colonel Milne in the 3rd Division, Colonels Leane (48th) and Imlay (47th) in the 4th, at 5.15, standing outside their exposed headquarters on Broodseinde Ridge, saw the reported withdrawal and endeavoured to reverse it.<sup>82</sup> The shelling around this pillbox was, as on the 9th, intense, and the two leaders were quickly wounded. After dark both 3rd and 4th Divisions were reported to be back at their starting points. Actually, some officers of the 9th Brigade throughout the night held a proportion of its men at Hillside Farm. The authorities in rear, however, were unaware of this, and ordered the consolidation of practically the same line from which the attack had started. Before dawn the advanced troops were brought back to it.<sup>83</sup>

The Second Army had thus practically returned to its starting point. So closely had the events of October 9th been repeated that those who took part, reading an account of the last fight, might easily believe that their own action was being described. And this applies almost equally to the dreadful scenes that followed. In the morass of the Ravebeek valley the dead and wounded of the 3rd Division now lay mingled with those of the 66th. It is true that the German snipers were not allowed to

<sup>80</sup> A party was sent north of the railway to cover the retirement. An officer of the 3rd Division also, when it was pointed out that the flank of the 4th was being exposed, brought forward a party.

<sup>81</sup> Lieut. F. E. H. Collins (Richmond, Vic.), 47th Bn., an admired leader, was killed by shell-fire in a post on the right.

<sup>82</sup> There occurred the usual misunderstandings, due to the fact that news took several hours to reach divisional headquarters. The 4th Division reported that the 3rd had retired while its own front was maintained. General Monash thereupon ordered that the flank of the 4th must be covered. Not till 6.30 p.m. did Major-General Sinclair-MacLagan (4th Divn.) know that his troops also were back.

<sup>83</sup> Three companies of the 47th were for a time commanded by Sergeant J. A. Heading (Netherby, Vic., and Murgon, Q'land). Lieutenant J. E. Smith (Cheepie, Q'land), sent up, reorganised the troops, supervised the digging in, and commanded the front line of the battalion.

reassume their former impudence; but during the fight they had sniped at least fifty men in the mud about Waterfields. Throughout October 13th stretcher-bearing parties struggled in the bog. Lieutenant Jackson (40th) even took bearers to Bellevue Spur and found ten wounded men still in the strong-point seized by Chamberlain and Cockerell. The Germans refrained from firing on the stretcher-parties, and in some cases directed them to Australian wounded. Men were even found unwounded but fast in the mud, into which they had jumped during the advance.<sup>84</sup> The stretcher-bearers' "carry" was a nightmare, and the pillbox aid-posts, around which the wounded lay in crowds on their stretchers, were a magnet for shell-fire.<sup>85</sup> Lieutenant Fisher (42nd Battalion), whose description of the 66th Division has been quoted, gives almost the same account of the relief on October 13th:

The next day (13th) we were ordered to retake<sup>86</sup> the line, and then our units sank to the lowest pitch of which I have ever been cognisant. It looked hopeless—the men were so utterly done. However, the attempt had to be made, and accordingly we moved up that night—a battalion 90 strong. I had "A" Company with 23 men. We got up to our position somehow or other—and the fellows were dropping out unconscious along the road—they have guts, my word! That's the way to express it. We found the line instead of being advanced, some thirty yards behind where we had left it—and the shell stricken and trodden ground thick with dead and wounded—some of the Manchesters were there yet, seven days wounded and not looked to. But men walked over them—no heed was paid to anything but the job. Our men gave all their food and water away, but that was all they could do.

That night my two runners were killed as they sat beside me, and casualties were numerous again. He blew me out of my shell-hole twice, so I shifted to an abandoned pillbox. There were twenty-four wounded men inside, two dead Huns on the floor and six outside, in various stages of decomposition. The stench was dreadful. We got the wounded away at last as well as two wounded Huns. . . .

When day broke I looked over the position. Over forty dead lay within twenty yards of where I stood, and the whole valley was full of them.

The New Zealand and 3rd Australian Divisions each suffered some 3,000 casualties, and the 12th Brigade (4th

<sup>84</sup> *The Fortieth*, p. 89. Some of the old shell-holes were like quicksands. Where possible, men had sheltered in the newly-made ones.

<sup>85</sup> See *Vol. XII, plates 402-3*. The medical officer of the 34th Battalion, Major G. R. C. Clarke (Wahroonga, N.S.W.), and some of his staff were killed while dressing the wounded. The spirit of some of the wounded is illustrated by the case of Cpl. W. A. Murray (formerly a Methodist minister, of Newcastle, N.S.W.), 35th Bn., who, when the longed-for stretcher-bearers arrived, gave up his place to a comrade, and was never again heard of.

<sup>86</sup> That is, to reoccupy the old line of Oct. 11.

Division), 1,000.<sup>87</sup> The Fifth Army this day gained little ground, and, while the attacking troops had been exhausted and depressed, the Germans, in spite of the severity of the casualties on their side also, had been encouraged and reinvigorated.

On the German side Crown Prince Rupprecht noted in his diary: "Sudden change of the weather. Most gratifyingly—rain; our most effective ally."

The Second Army's attack came against the same German divisions that had held the front in the last fight—for the first time since step-by-step operations began, there had been no need for relief. The "forward zone" system was not even yet in operation; the final order for it was issued this day. The attack was fully expected. Units were warned that their present position gave great opportunity for flanking fire, and were ordered to exploit this to the utmost. The long-planned "Mondnacht" gas-shoot<sup>88</sup> was laid down during the previous night. When the Anzac advance broke into the front between Passchendaele and the Keiberg, a battalion (I/55th R.I.R.) of the 220th Division was given to the 195th Division, and another (II/55th R.I.R.) to the 233rd. These, together with the line divisions, reoccupied the gap, capturing 56 unwounded and many wounded Australians. In the fighting of October 9 and 12, the 195th Division lost 3,325 officers and men.

Immediately after this fight, the forward zone system was established, the main German line being withdrawn to the Keiberg, Vienna Cottages, and Bellevue. Moreover, as the weight of the offensive was tending more northwards, a new corps command, the "Staden" group, was inserted between the "Ypres" and "Dixmude" groups. The Germans discovered the relief of the Canadians at Lens, and correctly interpreted it as meaning that the offensive there was ended. Their Lens divisions were thus set free for use in Flanders. Regular six-day reliefs were

<sup>87</sup> Particulars of the Australian casualties are:—

*3rd Australian Division (total casualties, 3,199).*

9th Infantry Brigade.			10th Infantry Brigade.			11th Infantry Brigade.		
Off. O.R.			Off. O.R.			Off. O.R.		
33rd Bn.	..	11 273	Bde. H.Q.	..	1 —	41st Bn.	..	4 127
34th Bn.	..	15 323	37th Bn.	..	11 236	42nd Bn.	..	2 110
35th Bn.	..	18 296	38th Bn.	..	13 364	43rd Bn.	..	1 96
36th Bn.	..	15 383	39th Bn.	..	6 174	44th Bn.	..	4 144
9th M.G. Coy.	1	36	40th Bn.	..	7 227	11th M.G. Coy.	2	41
9th L.T.M. Bty.	—	11	10th M.G. Coy.	3	27	11th L.T.M. Bty.	—	6
		60 1322	10th L.T.M. Bty.	—	17			13 524
		—			41 1045			—
Artillery	..	— 47			—	Pioneers	..	3 72
Engineers	..	1 16	23rd M.G. Coy.	1	13	Fld. Amb.	..	3 38

*12th Infantry Brigade (4th Divn.).*

Off. O.R.		
45th Bn.	..	8 187
46th Bn.	..	3 101
47th Bn.	..	13 292
48th Bn.	..	13 344
12th M.G. Coy.	2	45
12th L.T.M. Bty.	1	9
		—
Total	..	40 978

<sup>88</sup> See p. 910.



53. ZONNEBEKE VALLEY IN THE AUTUMN

Men returning along the planked road made by the 3rd Division's pioneers on the northern side of the Roulers railway

*Aust War Memorial Official Photo No E977  
Taken on 15th October, 1917*

*To face p 928*



54. ARTILLERYMEN HAULING AN 18-POUNDER INTO POSITION ON WESTHOEK RIDGE,  
27TH OCTOBER, 1917

*Aust War Memorial Official Photo No E1191*

*To face p 929*

eventually arranged. As the prospect was more favourable, Ludendorff again altered his policy, and decided that as little ground as possible was to be given up. On October 21 he ordered that all available field artillery must be put on the main front, and the British artillery suppressed with ample nightly gas-shooting.

Much of the effect of the antecedent successes was thus thrown away on October 9th and 12th. Haig now recognised that the hope of obtaining great strategic results from this year's campaign had vanished. He considered whether to stop the offensive or to secure by slower stages a better foothold on the ridge, rest there for the winter, and strike again in the spring. He had now in view an important attack on the Third Army front. The commander of that army, Sir Julian Byng, had pointed out that

**Later operations**

to give the operation the best chance of success, it should take place while the operations in Flanders are still in progress, or have just been suspended.

Moreover, the French were making a limited attack on a large scale at Malmaison on October 23rd, and Haig desired to help this. The Italian front had suddenly become passive—Cadorna, the commander-in-chief, having learned that reinforcements were being brought against him, and having therefore abandoned the offensive policy agreed on between the Allies.<sup>89</sup> The Russians not yet having made peace, it was important to keep the Germans from attacking them; and it seems probable that Pétain was still urging activity.<sup>90</sup> In these circumstances Haig decided to use the Canadian Corps, notwithstanding difficulties of weather, in capturing Passchendaele by more deliberate steps. Afterwards the Fifth Army, by taking Westroosebeke, was to render the new position secure. II Anzac was to hold its present front for another eight days, when the Canadian Corps would come in; II Anzac would then go out for a short rest, after which it would relieve the X Corps on the right of I Anzac. I Anzac would retain the Broodseinde front and guard the right of the Canadians when they renewed the advance on Passchendaele.

The active participation of Australian infantry in the offensive practically ended on October 12th. The Canadians

<sup>89</sup> The Italians had previously sought the aid of their allies for their offensive, and were receiving for it a number of British and French siege batteries.

<sup>90</sup> See *Field Marshal Earl Haig*, by Brig.-Gen. J. Charteris, p. 276.

did not attack until October 26th.<sup>91</sup> In the interval the conditions approximated to those of the previous winter on the Somme, but with this difference, that the excellence of the position on Broodseinde Ridge, the immense work on roads, railways, and duckboard tracks, and the employment of pack transport almost up to the front line, rendered the plight of the forward infantry, at least in the I Anzac sector, far less trying. For the artillery and the troops in support the conditions were worse than on the Somme. But the 4th and 5th Divisions, now holding the front, were comparatively fresh,<sup>92</sup> and the apparently impossible task of providing a third good road circuit, to extend over the long stretch from Westhoek to Zonnebeke, was suddenly solved by the discovery that the pavement of the Ypres-Zonnebeke road, although deeply covered with mud, was still there and had only to be dug out and repaired.<sup>93</sup> Employing for the work the 1st Pioneers under Lieutenant-Colonel Henderson, Lieutenant-Colonel Nicholson (C.R.E., I Anzac Corps Troops) repaired this road and pushed forward "Smith's Road" to join it, a forward circuit being thus eventually formed. General Birdwood and many of the engineers and infantry hoped to render carriage much easier by extending tramways into the forward area, and the railways also, both light- and broad-gauge (Ypres-Roulers), were now rapidly lengthened.<sup>94</sup> But the tramways, smashed by shelling and trodden over by infantry and mule-trains, proved useless; the light railways were constantly blown up.<sup>95</sup> Except for the carriage of artillery ammunition, the Army's requirements for transport had to be met almost entirely by the roads, and in I Anzac the construction of these chiefly depended on the standard of supervision set personally by Colonel Nicholson and his staff.

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<sup>91</sup> The Fifth Army undertook two small operations on Oct. 22, one with the French at Houthulst Forest, the other east of Poelcappelle.

<sup>92</sup> See Vol. XII, plates 405, 424.

<sup>93</sup> Up to the outskirts of Zonnebeke this road ran through II Anzac territory, but it led to the I Anzac front. II Anzac already had two roads, Wielte-Gravenstafel and Wielte-St. Julien, but its right division, like the left of I Anzac, was dependent on the Zonnebeke road.

<sup>94</sup> British and Canadian railway-construction units did most of this work (see Vol. XII, plate 408). Australians constructed the tramways.

<sup>95</sup> The Australian engineers laid five miles of light railways east of Ypres. But as many as 90 breaks occurred in one day; the railways could not be patrolled as easily as the roads, nor could dumps for repair be so easily maintained; and the effort proved largely useless. (See Vol. XII, plates 417-8.)



For forty-seven consecutive days I traversed those roads east of Ypres (he wrote afterwards). In all that time I never sent a working party out that I didn't personally visit with poor old Dentry.<sup>96</sup>

The casualties of the pioneers, who, together with "army troops" companies R.E., were mainly responsible for the roads, approximated to those of the attacking infantry.<sup>97</sup> Could the plank roads have been made more rapidly, they might have solved the problem of communication even on this battlefield. The effort of I Anzac in this respect was quite outstanding: 18,300 yards of plank road and 10 miles of metal road were made in 27 days. But even this construction was too slow to meet the need of the troops.

In the II Anzac area these facilities were not so far advanced, and, especially in the Ravebeek valley, the infantry was subjected to conditions approximating to those of Flers in November 1916. Lieutenant Fisher, whose description of the scene there on October 13th-14th has already been quoted, wrote:

We had another four days of this and then retired to a position 1,000 yards behind again. Here we stayed four days, and got shelled to hell, but no one minds that—a shell drops alongside, and one merely calls it a bastard and curses the Hun, and wipes off the mud. Anyhow we are out now and I don't mind much. Only I'd like to have a talk with some war correspondents—liars they are. The reaction is still to come, and I'm rather frightened of it—I feel about eighty years old now. . . .

The severe bombardment of the back areas, especially with mustard gas, was a factor new since the Somme battle.<sup>98</sup>

<sup>96</sup> Lieut. N. H. St. O. Dentry, 1st Pioneer Bn. (A Melbourne surveyor, b. Fitzroy, Vic., 1888.) He supervised road repairs, and was killed on Oct. 31 while on this duty near the Hannebeek. Among Col. Nicholson's other assistants were Captains C. D. Sheldon (Aylesford, Kent, Eng.) and A. McP. Greenlees (St. Kilda, Vic.; died 18 Aug., 1928), who largely supervised the Busseboom dump, workshops, and transport of planks; Captain W. N. McClean, adjutant of the corps troops engineers; and Captains P. H. Keys and G. A. Harris, Lieut. W. H. Owen, and other officers of the British "army troops" companies of engineers. A large party of these was maintained between the Menin Gate and Hellfire Corner, and patrols from it went daily round all the circuits in opposite directions, repairing them with material specially dumped at the roadsides. The water-supply from Dickebusch, and, later, from Zillebeke also, was under Major F. W. Lawson (Perth, W. Aust.). Hutting was under Sheldon and Greenlees. Nissen huts not being available, "Keys" huts were made to plans drawn by Captain Keys.

<sup>97</sup> As early as Sept. 23, the 1st Pioneer Bn. had lost 5 officers and 119 men, and by Oct. 4 the 2nd Pioneers had lost 170. On Sept. 19, a shell exploding in the garden at Swan Chateau, headquarters of the 2nd Pioneers, killed Major R. R. Hockley (Maryborough, Q'land), and mortally wounded Lieut. G. J. Furnell (North Brighton, Vic.) and his brother, Cpl. F. Furnell (Ascot Vale, Vic.), 15th Railway Coy. On Sept. 29 a platoon of the same battalion, waiting for coffee at the Comforts Fund stall on the Menin Road, was seen by a German airman, who dropped a bomb on it, killing or mortally wounding 18, and wounding 10. Bombs dropped at Swan Chateau also wounded 9 men.

On Oct. 15 the acting commander of the 3rd Pioneer Bn., Major W. A. Adams (Hawthorn, Vic.), was killed near Zonnebeke, where his battalion was making a plank road near the railway.

<sup>98</sup> Many well-known members of the A.I.F. were killed on tracks about this battlefield, among them Colonel W. W. Hearne (South Melbourne), A.D.M.S., 5th Division, a gentle, high spirited leader, Lieut.-Col. S. G. Gibbs (Kensington, Eng., and

Artillery, and the infantry in support, now underwent these almost nightly. The Germans used this new agent with dreadful success, masking the shoots with a bombardment of high-explosive, and throwing in first "sneezing gas" (blue cross—Diphenyl Chlorarsine), which rendered it difficult to keep the respirators on, and then changing over to mustard gas (yellow cross—Dichlorethyl Sulphide). Masks would have to be worn during the whole bombardment, precluding sleep. Bivouacs were frequently knocked in, and their ground, saturated with mustard oil, could not be reoccupied. On the nights of October 14th, 16th, 18th, and 19th the valleys behind the lines were drenched with mustard gas, causing, on October 16th alone, 116 casualties in I Anzac. The 43rd Battalion (II Anzac) sent away 40 men blistered and gassed after work on the railway near Zonnebeke. The 4th Division's artillery, having suffered 1,000 casualties in almost continuous action at Bullecourt, Messines, and Ypres, had to be withdrawn on October 25th, though no fresh batteries relieved it.

The 1st and 2nd Australian Divisions, which came into the I Anzac line on October 24th and 27th respectively, were to suffer from this cause more severely than the 4th and 5th which they relieved, or than the 3rd Australian and the New Zealand Divisions (II Anzac), which were relieved by the 4th and 3rd Canadian Divisions on October 22nd and 23rd. On the night of October 28th the 5th and 6th Batteries on Anzac Ridge, including their commanders,<sup>99</sup> were put out of action by gas. On November 2nd two more battery commanders were gassed, and died within forty-eight hours.<sup>100</sup> In a short tour in the support line, the 25th Battalion had 6 officers and 202 others gassed.<sup>101</sup> One company had to change its bivouac three times. The Australian

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Sydney), who had largely organised the transport service; Lieut.-Col. J. J. Nicholas (Colac, Vic.), 5th Field Ambulance; and Father M. Bergin (Rosscrea, Ireland), a missionary, who joined the force in Egypt and of whom a soldier said at Pozieres: "If ever an angel walked among men, it was he."

Bombing of the back areas was still severe. On Oct. 27 at "Belgian Chateau" the 2nd Battalion lost by air-bombing 16 killed and 30 wounded.

<sup>99</sup> Majors L. K. Cunningham (Neutral Bay, N.S.W.) and A. W. Dodd (Melbourne). In addition, 3 officers and 39 men were evacuated. The previous morning the German artillery pounded the position of the 11th Battery, now at Zonnebeke (to which the 4th Division advanced several batteries about Oct. 12), and destroyed three guns.

<sup>100</sup> Majors G. McLaughlin (1st Bty.) and W. A. R. Peart (4th Bty.). Lieut. L. C. Guy (1st Bty.) also died. (McLaughlin belonged to Waverley, N.S.W.; Peart to Rushworth, Vic.; Guy to Kew, Vic.)

<sup>101</sup> The Germans shelled their bivouacs at Westhoek and Garter Point on Oct. 27 for 2 hours, Oct. 28 for 5 hours, Oct. 29 for 7 hours, Oct. 31 for 8 hours. On this last night the relief was delayed for 8 hours by the shelling.

field artillery, inclusive of its "army brigades," had 148 casualties from gas in July, 38 in August, 100 in September, but 501 in October and 526 in November. Between mid-October and mid-November, practically without fighting, there was incurred a considerable proportion of the total gas-casualties of the A.I.F. Few immediate deaths were caused; of the 1,313 cases in the artillery here cited, only 20 were quickly fatal. But the condition of the worst cases was pitiful, eyes swollen and streaming, voices gone, and bodies blistered. Whole battalions came out hoarse from the effects, and the subsequent trouble for the nation was enormous.<sup>102</sup>

Before the Canadian infantry came in, the 3rd Division reoccupied part of the ground which had been won and lost on October 12th and had since been almost vacated by the enemy.<sup>103</sup> On the nights of October 15th, 17th, and 18th posts were established in front of Hillside Farm and Augustus Wood, about half-way to the first objective for October 12th.<sup>104</sup>

The Canadian Corps, whose headquarters took over from II Anzac on the 18th, planned to attack Passchendaele in three separate operations roughly corresponding to the three phases of the II Anzac attempt on October 12th. The first of these—the only one in which Australian infantry participated—took place on October 26th. The weather had continued wet.<sup>105</sup> Heavy rain fell this day and, in spite of the long and careful preparatory bombardment, the results of October 9th and 12th were, except for one circumstance, closely repeated. In the former New Zealand sector the 3rd Canadian Division attacking Bellevue, though mostly held up on about the same line as the New Zealanders, had managed, on the northern side of the spur, to capture two pillboxes beyond the wire. About noon the troops at this point were reinforced, and, fighting southwards from pillbox to pillbox, captured the defences which had stopped the 49th Division and the New Zealanders.

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<sup>102</sup> This matter will be dealt with in the *Official History of the Australian Army Medical Services, Vol. II.*

<sup>103</sup> Many observers thought that the Germans were at first unaware that it had been given up. They continued, for example, to shell Augustus Wood. The absence of signs of occupation, however, was probably partly due to the enemy's new policy of leaving a lightly-occupied "forefield zone," on which his guns were registered.

<sup>104</sup> The 33rd Battalion established three posts on the ridge on Oct. 15-16. On the right near the railway the Germans were close, and Lieut. G. C. Fraser (Sydney) was killed. Six posts were placed farther out on Oct. 17-18. The 148th Brigade (49th Divn.), taking over the line under the 3rd Division, established posts forward of Augustus Wood on Oct. 18-19.

<sup>105</sup> On an average, it rained on one day of every two.

On the old front of the 3rd Australian Division, the two brigades of the 4th Canadian Division had almost precisely the same experience as the 9th and 10th Australian Brigades on October 12th, and reached the same points. On their right, the 6th Australian Battalion (1st Division) repeated the effort of its predecessors, seized the Keiberg railway cutting and, assisted by a party of the 2nd Field Company, dug in beyond Decline Copse.<sup>106</sup> As before, at 4.15 p.m. a counter-attack emerged against this position, but not against that on the ridge. Company Sergeant-Major Palmer<sup>107</sup> (6th Bn.), sent across by Lieutenant McShane<sup>108</sup> to the nearest party of Canadians, promised that, provided the Australians were supported, they were determined, if necessary, to die at their post. The Canadian artillery laid a dense barrage on the Passchendaele Ridge, and the Australian machine-gun barrage could be seen scattering the advancing Germans.

At that juncture, however, precisely as on October 12th, the troops on the main ridge were suddenly seen retiring. No Germans were pressing them, and some days later it was learned that, as in the 66th Division on October 9th, some

<sup>106</sup> The attack was a most gallant episode, and deserves fuller description. It was made by Captain Pinney's company of the 6th, only 80 strong and reduced to three platoons. One was to attack, a second to follow in support, a third to carry and act as reserve. On the night before, a jumping-off trench was dug 250 yards ahead of Defy Crossing, but the attack-platoon under Lieut. H. G. Gay (Hawthorn, Vic.) found it full of water, and therefore assembled in shell-holes along the railway embankment.

At zero hour, 5.40 a.m., the barrage fell 100 yards ahead and "then it seemed to collapse and fall right on the assembled platoon." (A precisely similar incident was reported by the Canadians on the same day.) Lieut. Gay and many of the platoon were killed, and many wounded. C.S.M. J. J. Palmer re-formed the survivors farther back, and, within a minute after zero hour, advanced with these and the supporting platoon. For shelter against the Australian barrage, Palmer crossed the railway and led his force forward under the northern side of the embankment. It was observed that the Germans maintained a "roving" barrage moving between the Keiberg and the Australian front line. In the dim light the German infantry on the Keiberg, though themselves visible, could not see the advance. In the Keiberg cutting the garrison in the dugouts tried to push a machine-gun out of one dugout entrance, but were seen and shot at with the result that 30 with 3 machine-guns surrendered. The platoon had recrossed the railway and 30 more prisoners and a machine-gun were taken at some iron cupola dugouts south-east of Decline Copse.

Captain Pinney had on the previous evening gone across to the 46th Canadian Battalion and arranged co-operation, and this time the troops on the left reached their proper position at the same time as the flanking party. At 7.30 a detachment of the 2nd Field Company under Lieut. J. M. Reid (Hawthorn, Vic.) arrived, and set to work to dig the trench which Sergeant-Major Palmer's men had begun, well on the crest of the Keiberg. With the engineers arrived the reserve platoon, led up by Lieut. W. S. McShane. An aeroplane of each side flew over. Palmer had no flares, these having been carried by men of the attacking platoon who had been hit at the start, but the Australians waved their helmets and rifles. The airman mistook this for a bayonet attack on a German trench, but accurately reported their position. The engineers' party finished its work and left at 2.30, its officer following it, and being mortally wounded as he left.

<sup>107</sup> Lieut. J. J. Palmer, M.C.; 6th Bn. Carpenter; of Inglewood, Vic.; b. Richmond, Vic., 1890.

<sup>108</sup> Lieut. W. S. McShane, 6th Bn. Carpenter; of Bendigo, Vic.; b. Bendigo, 24 Dec., 1896. Killed in action, 9 Aug., 1918.

officer on the left had directed his troops to move back and form a flank connecting with the less-advanced line in the Ravebeek Valley. The forward Canadians, battered by direct fire of the same guns that had pounded the 66th and 3rd Australian Divisions, took this as a signal for general withdrawal and fell back. The 6th Australian Battalion was left at the Keiberg, and, for the third time, it became necessary to abandon this height. The retirement was followed by the usual misunderstanding; this time it was the 4th Canadian Division which was unaware of the withdrawal of its own troops, and believed that the Australians had retired leaving its flank in the air; when the truth was discovered—largely through the magnificent scouting of Lieutenant Lay (8th Bn.), who twice, almost alone, reconnoitred Decline Copse on the Keiberg<sup>100</sup>—the Canadians made a handsome acknowledgment.

In the three subsequent battles, in which the Canadians captured Passchendaele and some ground beyond it, Australian infantry took no part. The 4th Canadian Division protected its own flank in the attack of October 30th, in which it seized the "Blue Line"; I Anzac merely kept artillery and machine-gun fire on the Keiberg. The third stage of the operations was subdivided into two, which took place on November 6th and 10th, and 2nd and 1st Canadian Divisions having taken over the front from the 4th and 3rd Canadian. The last three attacks were on much narrower fronts than hitherto, in this respect resembling the operations on the Somme. The final attack was carried out in a rainstorm. The diary of an Australian states that it was delivered

on a very narrow front—almost as bad as Pozières; and the Germans . . . concentrated an enormous amount of artillery on to the area which we took, and the British were driven in. . . . The night is simply vile—and the day too. . . . If the Canadians can hold on they are wonderful troops.

They did hold on, but with this operation the great effort in Flanders ended. Momentous events were occurring elsewhere. On October 24th the Austrians, reinforced by six German divisions, drove through the Italians at Caporetto. In fear that Italy might be put out of the war, the French and

<sup>100</sup> He worked between the local Australian and Canadian headquarters and Decline Copse from the afternoon until next morning, C.S.M. Palmer being with him part of the time. The situation was tactfully handled by Brig-Gen. Heane, who, while agreeing to recapture Decline Copse if the Canadians were forward, managed to put off doing so until it had been proved that they were not. In this tour in the line, the 6th Btn. lost 3 officers and 67 others, and the 8th 4 and 80.

British Governments each promised six divisions. The Flanders offensive closed unsatisfactorily, Haig having to stop short of Westroosebeke, without which he considered the dearly-bought Passchendaele position indefensible. "The possibility of our having to evacuate Passchendaele and withdraw to a more defensible line was reckoned with," say Dewar and Boraston, "from the moment when our forward movement ceased." The British Army in Flanders went into its winter positions. II Anzac, this time without the 3rd Australian Division, relieved on November 14th I Anzac, and on November 18th the X Corps. The X Corps withdrew into reserve. The Australian forces in Flanders had now lost 38,093 officers and men during the Ypres offensive, and as, in these circumstances, the dwindling stream of Australian reinforcements gave rise to much anxiety, I Anzac was sent to relieve the VIII Corps on the wide, quiet front at Messines.<sup>110</sup>

In the brilliant surprise-stroke with tanks on the Third Army front (the Battle of Cambrai),<sup>111</sup> which set the Allies' spirits soaring in the belief that their leaders had discovered a way to victory—and in the equally impressive German counter-attack which ten days later deflated these sudden hopes—few dominion troops participated. The first Australian flying squadron to arrive in France, the 68th R.F.C. (later No. 2 A.F.C.),<sup>112</sup> and the 55th (Australian) Siege Battery were in the thick of it.<sup>113</sup> At the time of the German

<sup>110</sup> See Vol. XII, plates 425, 431, 442.

<sup>111</sup> The tanks were virtually useless at Ypres, and at the beginning of August their enthusiastic commanders had been searching for a suitable front on which they could be put in mass and with surprise, together with cavalry and flying corps, as at First Bullecourt, but after minute preparation. In September they obtained leave to plan out with the Third Army the long-considered offensive at Havrincourt.

It should be noted, however, that the element of surprise was due not simply to the use of tanks, but chiefly to the secrecy in moving up the artillery and commencing the barrage at zero hour *without previously registering the guns on to the enemy's defences.*

<sup>112</sup> Under an outstanding squadron commander, Major Oswald Watt (Sydney), who died on 21 May, 1921.

<sup>113</sup> The 55th (Aust.) Siege Battery had been relieved at Ypres on Oct. 21 by the 107th (Canadian) Battery from Angres, near Lens, the two exchanging positions. The Australians had been at Angres little over a fortnight when they were ordered to Villers Plouich, a ruined village in a hollow 4½ miles south-east of Hermies. Here they formed part of the 63rd Group, 111 Corps Heavy Artillery. Their guns (four 9.2-inch howitzers) were to be emplaced by night, with special secrecy, close behind the front line, for a surprise offensive to be launched probably on Nov. 19.

During the nights of Nov. 16–19 the guns were moved in, the first two being hauled by hand over the last 300 yards. This was done so quietly that Lieut.-Col. C. R. C. Boyle (Great Milton, Oxon, Eng.), 6th Bn., Oxford and Bucks L.I., whose headquarters were 100 yards away, was unaware of their presence until they had been emplaced. He then arranged that his machine-guns should fire steadily, to cover the noise of caterpillar tractors dragging in the other two. The

counter-attack, the 4th Australian Division had just reached a back area for its long-promised rest.<sup>114</sup> Owing to the absence of other reserves, it had to be hurried forward again to Péronne, but was not thrown in. For the A.I.F. the fighting of 1917 really ceased with the end of the Flanders offensive.

The year 1917 closed without the decision that each side had hoped for. The Allies' scheme of a combined offensive had early broken down through war-weariness; the submarine campaign to which the German leaders trusted had not brought Great Britain to her knees, although the defensive on the Western Front

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129th and 166th Siege Batteries belonging to the same group were in the valley, and numerous tanks also came up. The German front was only 800 yards away, and on Nov. 19 a bombardment by heavy German *minenwerfer* caused anxiety lest the concentration might have been discovered. The bombs fell behind the 55th Battery, which was in advance of the British heavy Stokes mortars and field artillery.

The howitzers fired no shot until 6.20 a.m. on Nov. 20, when the whole artillery burst in together and tanks and infantry advanced, followed later by cavalry. At 10.45 fire had to be stopped, the infantry having captured Marcoing, a southern outlier of Cambrai, on which the battery had been shooting. But, although the Canadian Cavalry Brigade took spirited action, the cavalry operations failed. On Nov. 21 the battery was still firing against the far edge of Marcoing. Much trouble was experienced through the guns shifting and tilting, but orders were received to advance two of them to the Hindenburg support line, about half-way to Marcoing.

The speed and success of the German counterstroke on Nov. 30 were entirely unexpected. Two of the Australian guns being out of action, men were lent to other batteries of the group. Being without information, the batteries fired on old targets until 10 o'clock, when it became necessary to remount one of the Australian guns. The first intimation of any serious development came with a message from the group giving this gun a new centre line 170 degrees farther right. This meant that the enemy was almost in rear. At 10.30 an order arrived to be prepared to destroy guns and abandon the position. Retiring troops now began to stream through. A field artillery brigade passed at a rapid pace; then men carrying breech-blocks and dial sights of dismantled guns; then infantry, with a colonel who said that the Germans were crossing a ridge 1,000 yards ahead with no one to stop them. The batteries were under machine-gun fire, and had no communication with headquarters of the group or of the corps heavy artillery, both of which were afterwards found to have retired, the enemy being closer upon them. The Australian battery commander was absent in Amiens (he was afterwards dismissed from the service). The three batteries were now under the senior officer present, an active commander, Major C. McG. Yates of the 129th Battery. The detachment with the advanced guns under Lieut. A. S. Shepherd (Sydney) had been ordered in. Up forward a cable-burying party was being used as infantry, and Lieut. L. K. Robinson (Newcastle-on-Tyne, Eng.), a British officer then serving with the 55th Battery, was assisting in the salvage of other guns. At 2 o'clock Yates, having sent away one of the Australian guns by an available tractor, ordered that the rest should be disabled and the personnel withdrawn. The men were sent away under the battery sergeant-major. Captain Manchester, Lieut. F. W. Dobson, B.Q.M.S. A. Waterer (Watson's Bay, N.S.W.) and Sergeants F. W. Owens (Granville, N.S.W.) and D. M. McRae (Fremantle, W. Aust.) stayed to dismantle the guns. As the position was being used for a medical dressing station and the road was blocked with troops, the howitzers could not be blown up, but the cartridges were placed inside the carriages and burnt, and breech screws and gears damaged. The party then withdrew.

As it turned out, there was no need for the withdrawal. The action of the 29th Division ahead, and of the Guards Division to the right rear at Gouzeaucourt, incidentally saved the Australian guns from capture, although the enemy was close to the forward position. By Dec. 14 the last gun was retrieved by parties under Lieut. Dobson.

<sup>114</sup> The division reached Gamaches on Nov. 23, was ordered to Péronne on Dec. 3, and left on the 5th. It arrived at Haut Allaines next day.

had already given it nearly double the time originally required by the German Admiralty. By December success through this means was almost hopeless; the new ship construction of the Allies and neutrals was almost replacing the losses, and by the second quarter of 1918 it exceeded them. Had it not been for the bending of most of the Allies under the war strain, the outlook of the German leaders would for several months past have been desperate. But since April French endurance had been dangerously overtaxed by Nivelle's offensive; the Italian Army on October 24th had suffered an ominous breakdown; the Russian Soviet leaders on December 15th, after nearly a month's negotiation, secured an armistice.

While the two latter events chiefly influenced the campaign of 1918, the condition of the French Army after the Aisne was the determining factor of the campaign on the Western Front in 1917. The long-drawn-out effort of the British at Ypres, planned and authorised with other intentions, came to be, first and foremost, a diversion to keep the Germans engaged while the French recovered. As long as military history has its students, they will probably differ over the question whether that effort was justified. But those who maintain that the British Army could have played a more or less passive rôle are out of touch with the realities of that situation. It is not sufficient to show that French resentment at British inaction *might* not have had fatal consequences, or that the Germans *might* not have attacked the French Army, or that, if relieved by the British on part of its front, that army *might* have shattered a German offensive. The situation was such that Great Britain could not afford to take a risk. The crises in France and Russia forced the British Army to play a giant's part, carrying the main weight of the war for the time being on its shoulders, and suffering whatever exhaustion might be involved in the process.

The British Cabinet probably grasped as clearly as did Sir Douglas Haig the fact that, after the mutinies in May, the French could not play their rôle in the plan agreed on at Paris on May 4th. It differed from him in its dread of committing the British Army to the task of maintaining practically without assistance the offensive on the Western Front. It suspected that if sole action by Great Britain was necessary she might direct her effort more effectively elsewhere



than against the deep fortifications and dense garrisons of the Germans in Flanders. The desperate search for an alternative, however, failed to produce any upon which the political leaders could agree, and it is unlikely that a careful student will be attracted by the other courses chiefly favoured—a combined offensive either on the Italian or on the Salonica front. In both of those theatres not only were the natural difficulties at least equal to those of Flanders, but anything less than overwhelming success of the Entente could be watched by the German command almost with indifference. But in Flanders there could be no question of indifference—there the Germans were vitally sensitive to every advance of even a thousand yards. The exertion of all available strength there would definitely keep the main enemy engaged. Whether or not it was the best conceivable plan is a matter for speculation, but at least it was certain to be effective. It is to Haig's credit that he recognised this and, with Robertson's support, induced the War Cabinet to agree to a trial of it in accordance with the methods laid down by the Paris conference.

The offensive was launched, but step-by-step tactics of the kind favoured by the more cautious military leaders and by the Government—aiming only at successes almost mathematically consequent upon the Allies' advantages in gun-power<sup>118</sup>—were not adhered to. Haig's desire—largely due to the Admiralty's urgency—to drive the Germans from the coast, and his belief that they were weakening, caused him to continue attacking despite the most unfavourable conditions. A month of disappointment, fighting of dreadful intensity with meagre success and great loss, reminiscent of the Somme, finally alienated the previously reluctant support of the Prime Minister and of many others. From August onwards they would have liked to stop the operations. But Haig's position with the army and nation was so strong that he fought his offensive through to the end, even in the winter mud of Flanders, securing reinforcements by combing out the troops in France when he could not obtain sufficient drafts from England. The fact that more than half the fighting was in the wet caused this battle to be remembered with more detestation than any in which British troops ever took part. General Gough—though, after Mouquet Farm and Bullecourt,

<sup>118</sup> And in ammunition supply. The Allies in the West then had nearly 4 guns to every 3 German guns, but the German guns were heavier.

he was credited by Australians with the initiation of every unpopular action of the Higher Command—was against its continuance. The Prime Minister was seeking a pretext to put an end to it. But Haig and Robertson, standing, immovable as two grim Covenanters, for a stern article of their military faith, persisted and carried the British Empire with them.

And, when it comes to summing up all the criticism, the consideration which must far outweigh all others is that, in its main object, the offensive succeeded. Even if less costly methods might have sufficed, that fact remains. The Germans were placed under intense strain, and could not attack the French; Pétain was enabled to "wait for the Americans and the tanks." True to tradition, the British, in a time of confusion, quietly picked up the burden from the flagging Allies, and steadily carried it until others were again able to assist. German historians state all this as unequivocally as many of the British. The German official monograph affirms:<sup>116</sup>

There remained to the Allies as their one positive gain from the Flanders Battle the certainty that, by tying down the Germans under intensely severe strain, they survived the crisis which arose in the interval between the breakdown of Russia, the onset of the unlimited submarine campaign, and the reverse of the French in April, on the one side, and, on the other, the hoped-for time when American help would begin to be effective. In the year 1918 it turned out that this success definitely contributed to the result that the war ended in favour of the Allies, but when the Flanders Battle broke off they had no inducement to look upon it as decisive. . . .

General von Kuhl says:<sup>117</sup>

There can be no doubt to-day . . . that, in point of fact, English stubbornness bridged over the crisis in France. . . . The help which England brought to the cause of the Entente was compensated by the result.

Haig, therefore, even in the judgment of his opponents, achieved his main object. Of the pursuit of his second aim—that of wearing them down—it can also be said that, at least during the phase experienced by the Anzac forces, his tactics were infinitely more suitable than those employed on the Somme in 1916, when "wearing-down operations" were sometimes a dreadful chain of local attacks, but more often merely another name for defeated attempts to break through. The wearing-down methods of the second stage of Third

<sup>116</sup> *Schlachten des Welt Krieges*, Vol. 27 (Flanders, 1917), p. 141.

<sup>117</sup> *Der Weltkrieg*, 1914-1918, Vol. 2, p. 126.

Ypres were the product of lucid thought, a world removed from those loosely-devised strokes. Whether or not the lucidity was Haig's, he is entitled to the credit of having adopted the process.<sup>118</sup> It is true that attrition, as he seems to have conceived it, was a bludgeoning process, repellent to many agile minds, but by ingenuity it could be made terribly effective. If Haig was still hitting the Germans where they were strongest, he was, on September 20th and 26th and October 4th, employing methods carefully devised to crush their strength with the least possible reduction of his own. Here were no more assaults on narrow fronts, no wasting of strength in nightmare series of local operations, but clean, wide attacks undertaken only when the infantry was fresh and well-protected by an overpowering artillery, and success therefore practically certain. The system had one principal defect—the limited advance never quite reached the mass of the enemy's artillery, which, though temporarily dislocated, was able to retire and carry on the fight at the next stage; and more economy of life would have been attained by abandoning the precaution, unnecessary in fine weather, of holding in force the rearward positions. But how welcome were the tactics of Ypres after the experiences of Pozières, Fromelles, Flers, and Bullecourt,<sup>119</sup> many recorded comments of Australian soldiers bear witness. It is not surprising to learn that—although the balance of loss was still strongly against the British—the methods of Ypres were considerably less expensive to attacker, and more expensive to the attacked, than were those of the Somme.

Whatever its cost to the British—and this will presently be considered—Haig's offensive helped to wear down his opponents. General von Kuhl writes:

On this point Field Marshal Haig was right in his judgment—even if he did not break through the German front, the Flanders Battle wore down the German strength to a degree at which the damage could no longer be repaired. The German sword, heretofore sharp, was blunted.

Ludendorff says:<sup>120</sup>

The troops had borne the continuous defensive with extreme difficulty. Skulkers were already numerous. They reappeared as soon as the battle was over, and it had become quite common for divisions

<sup>118</sup> Such methods were sometimes called "Pétain tactics," but see p. 944, footnote.

<sup>119</sup> All of these except Flers were also fought in fine weather.

<sup>120</sup> *My War Memories*, Vol. II, p. 542.

which came out of action with desperately low effectives to be considerably stronger after only a few days. Against the weight of the enemy's material, the troops no longer displayed their old stubbornness.

The German official monograph states that "neither the Somme nor the Arras Battle could compare in dreadfulness" with this battle in Flanders. "No battle in the war," it says again, "was so bloody . . . if one considers the duration of the fighting and the width of the front." Apart from the vast loss of men—which, with her smaller reserves, and America coming in, Germany could afford less well than her opponents—the sense of powerlessness against the ever-increasing armaments of the Entente had its effect upon her troops. Eighty-six of the best German divisions took part, and their quality was never again the same.

In his third aim, to drive the Germans from the coast, Haig failed completely, and in the opinion of several great soldiers this object was never attainable. Foch asked Sir Henry Wilson why Haig wanted to go on this "duck's march" in Flanders. Even Sir William Robertson, who served Haig as a rock of support against the doubts of the Government, lost confidence in his strategic design. The danger to any section of the Allied forces, whose leader, with necessarily limited knowledge, endeavoured to achieve a decision single-handed, was obvious.

Yet in the minds of many who took part in the step-by-step campaign of September and early October there will always remain a conviction that, if the weather had afterwards favoured Haig as much as it actually fought against him, those sure tactics might have led to a great strategic achievement; at Broodseinde he stood upon the brink of it. There is no doubt that, so long as the step-by-step principle was rigidly adhered to, Haig's success in both wearing down his enemy and moving towards his strategic goal was very great.<sup>121</sup> His true conception—that in this area a wearing-down process might incidentally secure great strategic results—gave a keen motive to his army, and vigour to the whole campaign. It

<sup>121</sup> The peculiar outlook of German historians of the war will not allow them to admit total military failure. By assuming an intention on Haig's part to break through, they make it appear that each British advance ended in a repulse. Yet Haig's orders have long since been known to the world, and honest study would have shown that the line gained on Sept. 20 and 26 and Oct. 4 was in each case (except for unimportant divergences) the objective set in those orders, and was attained by completely victorious troops, who were neither intended nor permitted to go farther. Whether Ludendorff's reversion to a still lighter tenure of the forward zone would have proved an effective answer to the step-by-step method is doubtful. It did not defeat the Canadians.

is true that, in the autumn of 1917, even the capture of the Belgian coast would have lost much of its anticipated effect on the German outlook; the collapse of Russia had opened a new vista. But the shaking of the German position in Flanders by three more successes similar to those of the step-by-step campaign would, at the least, have had powerful reactions.

The charge against Haig's plan and conduct of operations is, not that they were ineffective—his strongest critics admit that they had considerable result—but that they were enormously expensive. The official compilation—*Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire during the Great War*—gives the total casualties for the whole sector of the B.E.F. in the Third Ypres and the Cambrai offensives, and those of the Somme Battle, 1916, as follows:—

Third Ypres (1917) and Cambrai		Somme (1916)	
British	.. 448,614	..	481,842
German	.. 270,710	..	236,194

It has been established that the discrepancy between the casualties of the two sides was not so great as appears in this table;<sup>122</sup> but, even if the British figure cited was ten per cent too high and the German thirty per cent too low, the British would still be shown to have lost at Ypres and Cambrai 52,000 more men than the Germans. Yet Haig throughout believed that the balance was the other way. In his despatch after the attack of July 31st, he advised the Government of his opinion that the German casualties exceeded the British "not improbably by a hundred per cent." In his final despatch he affirmed it to be "certain that the enemy's loss considerably exceeded ours." In these estimates and in his conviction that his opponents' morale was near breaking point, he was tragically misled by the optimism of his intelligence staff.<sup>123</sup> Here, as with the Somme offensive, it is incredible that he would have persisted without a most searching revision of

<sup>122</sup> The investigations of the British Official Historian have shown that the official figures for the British loss on the Somme are too high, and the German authorities have found that their original figures were too low. See *Military Operations, France and Belgium 1916, Vol. I, pp 496-7.*

<sup>123</sup> The German loss on the British front Jan-Nov. 1917 was estimated at 995,620. The same method of calculation would make the loss at Ypres and Cambrai 514,220. Brig.-Gen. Charteris, however, has stated that Haig sometimes went beyond his conclusions. Haig also seems to have over-estimated the effect of one blow on the troops opposing the next. The Germans were always able to relieve exhausted divisions.

his methods, or that the British Government would have allowed him to do so, if the true incidence of the loss had been known.

What else could Haig have reasonably attempted? The Cambrai offensive—an experiment which was urged upon him by more imaginative men, and which he permitted only after considerable resistance—shows one means that could undoubtedly have been better and earlier used. Cambrai proved that, contrary to his belief, the most powerful instrument of victory, surprise, by which alone could great results be cheaply secured, lay ready to his hand. But there were limits to the possible use of that method in 1917. Nearly all the tanks of the B.E.F. were employed at Cambrai; their efficiency was not as great as in 1918; and the ease with which surprise was effected was not unrelated to the concentration of the enemy's attention and forces at Ypres. Moreover, it is at least arguable that the ultimate victory of the Entente was assisted by the circumstance that, before their final blows in 1918, tanks were only once employed with impressive success. What course then could Haig usefully adopt other than that which he did?

Some at least of those who were present at these operations will find an answer in Rawlinson's and Davidson's memoranda on the step-by-step method. When the battle began, granted fair weather, there was ample time to achieve by that method even Haig's most extensive aims. And, when the weather broke, a decision to attack only when conditions were favourable would still have kept the Germans employed. It would have brought all the strategic results that were actually attained; would have robbed the Germans of any consolation from successful resistance; and would have spared Haig's own troops from calamitous loss and maintained them in abounding spirits. Even Lloyd George might have been reconciled to the pursuance of "Pétain tactics."<sup>124</sup> Difficult as was the situation of the French, it was not such as to force Haig to incur defeats by continuing his pressure in unsuitable weather. And, had he not done so, the chief horrors of Third Ypres would have been suffered only by

<sup>124</sup> Lloyd George on several occasions desired to explore the possibilities of "Pétain tactics," which appear to have been indistinguishable from the step-by-step tactics of the British staff, and, indeed, had a common parentage. See pp. 540-53, also *Soldiers and Statesmen*, Vol. II, pp. 242 and 245; and Callwell's *Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson*, Vol. II, p. 41.

his opponents, and the balance of loss would have been more favourable to the Entente.

It may, however, be doubted whether the logical perfection of this process appealed to Haig as forcibly as to more precise minds. His instinct to hold on with his fangs into the enemy swayed him far more strongly than any syllogism. He continued his offensive in weather in which the basic conditions for the step-by-step method were but doubtfully secured, and when its certainty of success had vanished. In the rains of August and October, he attacked when his guns could neither subdue the enemy's artillery nor screen their own infantry, and when the infantry could not retain its freshness. In the costly and depressing defeats that resulted, he threw away much of the advantage, material and moral, of his previous victories. How far the ratio of the British loss to that of the Germans was affected, it is impossible to determine; but that it was increased is certain.

All available evidence tends to show that, in so departing from his certain method, Haig's motive was to profit by the supposed deterioration of the enemy, and to secure definitely strategic results. At least this was the case on October 9th and 12th when, despite the adverse weather, preparation was shorter and the objective deeper than before. Haig's policy of "wear down the enemy but at the same time have an objective"<sup>125</sup> may have led to loose thinking. The criticism of his Flanders tactics most difficult to rebut is, that he did not consistently make the pursuit of his strategical aim dependent upon the adoption of the only method, which, in that terrain, rendered his objects attainable at reasonable cost. It is only fair to the British Cabinet to point out that this, according to Sir William Robertson, was, in effect, what it demanded of him.

The final—mainly Canadian—operations against Passchendaele form a phase distinct from the rest of the campaign, having a modified aim. Haig still desired to tie down the enemy, but he had abandoned his larger strategic design, and was merely endeavouring to secure a tenable position on the ridge. The extreme difficulties of attacking in the wet were this time carefully met by shortening the advances and lengthening the preparation. As a diversion, these operations

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<sup>125</sup> See footnote 24 on p. 697.

completely achieved their object, although the effort to attain a defensible position failed. Whether the prolongation of the offensive in the autumn mud was justified by its general influence on the war, is a question germane to the Canadian history.

Critics have tended to deal with Third Ypres as a whole, dismissing it as a tragic effort in the mud. But if such a critic had met some Anzac unit coming out of the line on October 5th, in bouncing spirits after repeated immersions in the battle, he would have recognised that the operation could not be adequately dealt with by one sweep of his pen. Probably a fair judgment of Haig's leadership in the whole battle is—that his determination and loyalty to the general cause ensured the bridging of the most dangerous gap in the effort of the Entente; that he wore down his enemy, though not so quickly as he believed or intended; and that his thrust might, with favourable weather, have attained strategic success; but that the immense cost at which these results were secured could have been much diminished if G.H.Q. had been more closely in touch with the conditions of the battlefield, and Haig's methods more consistently adapted to them.<sup>126</sup>

The gravity of the British loss is not easily exaggerated. The gradual elimination of the glorious material that had crowded the camps in 1914-15—and especially of the officers—was, though at first almost imperceptibly, to have its sure effect. Moreover, the reservoir on which Haig was drawing was not limitless; after his gigantic seasonal drafts upon it—500,000 on the Somme, 400,000 at Ypres—the bottom was all too clearly in sight. When in the near future he pressed for still more men, the War Cabinet felt, not without reason, that, if given another 100,000, he would stake them to gain the next shell-shattered hilltop; he would use up all he had, and his side would not be appreciably nearer to victory. To political leaders, forced to accept his plans but shocked with the result, the obvious moral was: "Keep back the men."

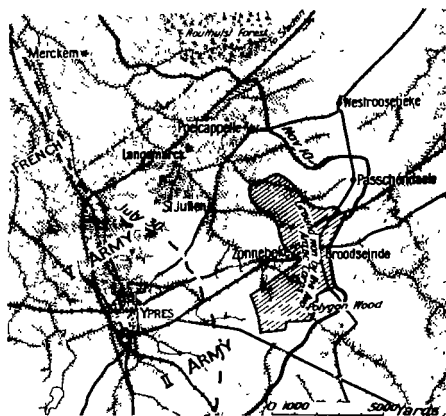
For the Australian force, in spite of the events after October 5th, which give a sinister colour to all memories of Passchendaele, the Third Battle of Ypres was in the main a successful offensive, at one stage brilliantly so. The loss was

<sup>126</sup> Such criticism cannot be dismissed as mere wisdom after the event. The policy of, from time to time, handing the advantage to the enemy instead of relying on the known advantages of the Allies, was bitterly criticised before the events, and its results were fully foreseen.



heavy, on an average 7,300 for each Australian division. But this figure is lower by 700 than the corresponding one for the first inset on the Somme, 1916,<sup>127</sup> and far more had been effected, with less agony to those who achieved it. With the exception of parts of the 2nd and 3rd Divisions after the Passchendaele fighting, the infantry never came out of action in the condition in which it had issued from Pozières and Flers; each of the three first steps left it with an ample reserve of strength in hand.

The Australian force in France was employed this year more effectively than in 1916. It may fairly be likened to an actor who, in a large cast, plays almost always a prominent part. The history of four great episodes—the German withdrawal on the British front, and the Battles of Bullecourt, Messines, and



*The advance at Ypres, July 31 to Nov. 10. The ground won by the two Anzac corps is hachured.*

Third Ypres—could not be adequately written without a study of the Australian part in them. In the last the six Anzac divisions, as subsequently the four Canadian, were definitely used in the main series of operations, and their effectiveness, which was acknowledged, was attributed by British leaders to the circumstance that most colonial units remained continuously under the same corps commanders and staffs, and were composed throughout of similar personnel. Staff documents of this time refer to them and to certain others as "homogeneous corps"; there was a tendency to regard such corps as having a distinct advantage over others for

<sup>127</sup> According to the corrected figures of 3rd Echelon, the total casualties were: A.I.F. on Western Front, 31 July-15 Nov., 1917, 38,093, 1, 2, 3, 4, & 5 Aust. Divns. (same period), 36,543. (This closely agrees with the *Statistics of the Military Effort*, pp. 263-4. The figures for 20 Sept.-31 Dec. on p. 326 of that work, and those cited by Rt. Hon. W. S. Churchill in Parliament on 3 Mar., 1919, seem to represent I Anzac casualties only.) The 3rd Echelon figure for the casualties of the 1, 2, & 4 Divns., 16 July-6 Sept., 1916, is 24,237. The figures in *Vol. III* (pp. 862-3) are from G.H.Q. records, and may be less accurate.

achieving efficiency, and their employment for particular tasks was increasingly influenced by this consideration. Of the fighting in this difficult year, the Australian infantry had been allotted no more than other tried, hard-fighting troops of the British Army; but, as *every* "dominion" division came within that category, the result—entirely unintended, and even unrealized, by G.H.Q.—was that, in general, beyond any question, the fighting now fell more fully upon them than on the British. During this year the infantry of the British divisions suffered, in proportion to their strength at the end of it, 88 per cent of casualties, the New Zealand 95, the Australian 97, and the Canadian 103. Haig's opinion of the Australian soldier is well attested;<sup>128</sup> in effect, G.H.Q. was tending to use all oversea divisions, along with a large number of the British ones,<sup>129</sup> as shock troops; and the Australian infantryman, so far as he was concerned, was fully agreeable, provided that he received the rest which such employment necessitated, and which was given in so generous a measure to I Anzac both before and after the Flanders offensive.

Whether the losses of the Australian infantry would allow it to continue playing an important rôle was another matter. Coming on top of diminished recruiting in Australia, the casualties at Ypres furnished an acute problem for the A.I.F. Just when the divisions had reached a special pitch of effectiveness, the stream of reinforcements for them was drying at the source. The Somme battle in 1916 had been followed in Australia by the first referendum on conscription, and now, on the 8th of November, 1917, after hearing of the drastic measures necessary to keep the divisions up to strength,<sup>130</sup> the Australian Prime Minister announced the Government's decision to take a second referendum.

Meanwhile those divisions, resting on a quiet front, depended for their reinforcement largely on the return of sick and wounded men. There was some reason to fear that the A.I.F. had passed its zenith of achievement, and would have to face the fighting of 1918 in weaker numbers and with overstrained and inelastic material.

<sup>128</sup> He told Birdwood that, when the Duke of Connaught showed surprise at his opinion that I Anzac were among the best disciplined troops in the B.E.F., he had rejoined: "When they are ordered to attack they always do so."

<sup>129</sup> Taking the same method of comparison, losses exceeding 100 per cent were suffered by 16 (out of 52) British divisions, and 5 (out of 10) oversea ones. The 12th and 20th British Divisions actually lost 152 per cent, the 3rd Australian 135, 4th Canadian 128, 3rd British 121, 15th Scottish and 4th Australian 116.

<sup>130</sup> These are described in *Vol. V.* (chap. i).

## APPENDIX No. 1

### THE MINES AT HILL 60<sup>1</sup>

Both English and German records agree that in the Hill 60 system in 1915-17 underground warfare reached a tension<sup>2</sup> which was not surpassed anywhere on the British front, and from the 9th of November,<sup>3</sup> 1916, until the 7th of June, 1917—that is, for the last seven months before the explosion of the great mines and the advance of the front—this system was held, on the British side, by the 1st Australian Tunnelling Company.

Although the work of guarding the two great mines—constant tunnelling and “blowing” to shoulder aside the enemy’s perpetual thrusts—was carried out to a successful issue by **The early mines** the Australians, the Hill 60 system was created by many companies. As in Gallipoli, it was the extraordinary value placed by each side on a small patch of ground that caused mining to be undertaken there. Two and a half miles south-east of Ypres the railway to Comines passes through the sickle-shaped ridge (if it deserves the name) that curves round the Ypres



flats, and the earth thrown up from the railway cutting made three small artificial rises. North of the railway it slightly raised the small height known as “Hill 60”;<sup>4</sup> south of the railway it created two heaps, known as “The Dump” and “The Caterpillar.”<sup>5</sup> The Germans had in December 1914 driven the French, fighting beside the British, from the greater part of Hill 60 and from The Caterpillar, and the French had almost immediately begun mining. When in February 1915 the British relieved them, G.H.Q. decided to recapture the hill and, being advised that this was the only part in the area at

which tunnelling was possible, pushed on with the mines, using, in the early days, Territorials from Wales and Northumberland, experienced in mining.<sup>6</sup> The enlistment of special troops skilled in mining through clay by the process known as “clay-kicking” (by which a miner on an adjustable seat drives his spade with both feet) had been suggested in December 1914 by a well known British contractor, Major Norton-Griffiths;<sup>7</sup> and on the 9th of April there arrived in France the first draft of specially enlisted men who, with miners transferred from older units, formed the 171st (Tunnelling) Company, Royal Engineers. By then three galleries, each with two branches, had been driven well beneath the German line, and on the

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 574-5, 592-4, 599, 601.

<sup>2</sup> See *History of the 204th (German) Infantry Division*, and reports of the Controller of Mines, Second (British) Army.

<sup>3</sup> Australian miners had worked at Hill 60 under the 3rd Canadian Tunnelling Coy since November 3.

<sup>4</sup> From the 60 metre ring that marked its summit on the maps.

<sup>5</sup> The “Spoil Bank” where the Ypres-Comines Canal cut through the same ridge was also of military value.

<sup>6</sup> The British Official History (*Military Operations, France and Belgium, 1915, Vol. I, p. 167*, from which most of this early history is drawn) states that an experiment was first made south of the canal at St. Eloi, but that “at Hill 60 alone did it seem to be practicable.”

<sup>7</sup> Lieut.-Col. Sir John Norton Griffiths, Bt., K.C.B., D.S.O. Engineer and Public Works contractor; of London; b. St. Andries, Somerset, Eng., 13 July, 1871. Died 27 Sept., 1930.

evening of April 17th, after the firing of five mines,<sup>8</sup> the 13th British Brigade rushed the hill almost without loss **17th April, 1915** but became involved in a desperate struggle to retain it. In the following week the Germans broke the conventions of war with their first gas-attack; and, in the later developments of this fighting, on May 5th, the summit of Hill 60 was again lost. The old mine-craters lay eventually behind the second line of German trench.

But, from the existing mine-galleries, the British continued to tunnel into the western slope. The Germans, also, had galleries protecting their front and others feeling for the British line, both sides working some fifteen feet below the surface. About the middle of 1915 it was decided that an attempt should be made to pass below the German galleries and the task was begun in August 1915 by the 175th Tunnelling Company. From an entrance in the bank of the railway cutting, 220 yards in rear of the front line, a gallery was driven<sup>9</sup> which eventually passed below the British line ninety feet below the surface. Towards the end of the year, however, when it was heading beneath the railway cutting, straight for The Caterpillar, its progress was greatly hampered by constant "blows" and counter-blows in the shallow system. At the same time a German miner captured by the infantry let fall the information that the Germans on their side were driving a fairly deep gallery to blow up the bridge over the railway cutting, which was in British hands. A branch gallery was at once tunnelled out to the right to meet them, and a *camouflet* was blown which destroyed 200 feet of the main gallery. After seven and a half months the 175th Company was showing the effects of the strain, and on April 8th it was relieved by the 3rd Canadian Tunnelling Company.<sup>10</sup>

The Canadians, making an elbow near the break, tunnelled forward again and from the same point drove a branch gallery at right angles to the left, straight for Hill 60. Within three **The Canadians** months they had passed beneath the German mining system, and in July 1916 began charging a mine under Hill 60 with 53,500 lb. of high explosive. By August this charge had been tamped (that is to say, the gallery behind it had been securely blocked) with the bags of earth brought from The Caterpillar gallery. By October 1916 that mine also had been charged with 70,000 lb. and tamped.

This had not been effected without a sharp struggle in the defensive mining system. For better protection the Canadians in August began a system of galleries intermediate between the "shallows" and the "deeps," starting from the deep system<sup>11</sup> and

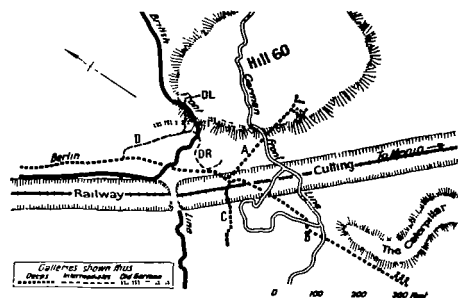
<sup>8</sup> The Germans also had begun mining, and a sixth British mine was not brought to completion, an enemy gallery being too close to allow work to continue without detection. It is implied in the British history that these were the first mines fired at Hill 60. Several *camouflets* (small charges intended to crush in the enemy galleries, but not to break the surface of the ground), had, however, been fired by the French from a small gallery tunnelled by them.

<sup>9</sup> It was to "lead to Berlin" and was therefore known as the "Berlin Sap."

<sup>10</sup> Twenty British tunnelling companies had been formed in 1915, and another in 1916. At the end of 1915 and early in 1916 three Canadian tunnelling companies arrived in France. Three Australian companies and one New Zealand company had arrived by the end of April 1916.

<sup>11</sup> This drive, leading off from the "deeps," was known as "D." The main tunnels were "Berlin" (the approach), "A" (the Hill 60 gallery), and "B" (to The Caterpillar). The defensive gallery to the right, destroyed by the 175th Company's *camouflet*, was "C."

rising to about fifty feet from the surface.



This system lay close on the left of the main system, beneath the shallows, and at an early stage it ran into an abandoned German gallery which was found to extend well behind the British line.<sup>12</sup> The Canadians incorporated this gallery in their own system. In September Germans were heard mining perilously close to the great Hill 60 mine. So near were

they that G.H.Q. gave leave for the firing of the mine, if necessary.<sup>13</sup> The danger, however, was avoided (as the Controller of Mines reported) by "very fine counter-mining work carried out under very difficult conditions" by the Canadians.

Six months' work in the mines at Hill 60 was considered as sufficient strain for the nerves of any troops, and on November 9th, after seven months of extraordinarily gallant and clever mining, the 3rd Canadian Company was relieved by the 1st Australian Tunnelling Company. G.H.Q. had received a very good report of the capabilities of the Australian miners from Major Hill,<sup>14</sup> who, however, was constantly "at them" to increase the speed of the work. The main cause of their comparative slowness at the start was their ignorance of the clay-kicking process, the expeditious method already described. G.H.Q. suspected lack of discipline, and "strikes," but its opinion nevertheless was that "these Australian companies" were exceptionally effective, provided they were given some vital task "to work off their energies: listening and pumping are not enough—their keenness and efficiency are too great for nominal defensive." A "Godsent" work had been found for No. 1 Company in the excavation of the "Catacombs" in the bowels of Hill 63, opposite Messines, a system containing underground quarters for two complete battalions "Undoubtedly most efficient work," commented Major Stokes.<sup>15</sup> inspecting for G.H.Q. "It will stand as a show piece of work."<sup>16</sup> The company had occupied the shallow mining system between Armentières and Ploegsteert,<sup>17</sup> but in its new area the fighting both over and under ground was incomparably more tense. Casualties through bombardment began to occur from the time of its arrival.

<sup>12</sup> It had been broken into by an earlier British mine-explosion, which cut off the gallery from the main German system.

<sup>13</sup> See Vol III, pp. 323-4. It was arranged that the infantry should attack at the same time.

<sup>14</sup> Lieut.-Col. L. E. Hill, O.B.E., M.C. Mining engineer; of Forfar, Scotland, and London, b. Richmond, Surrey, Eng., 14 Sept., 1884.

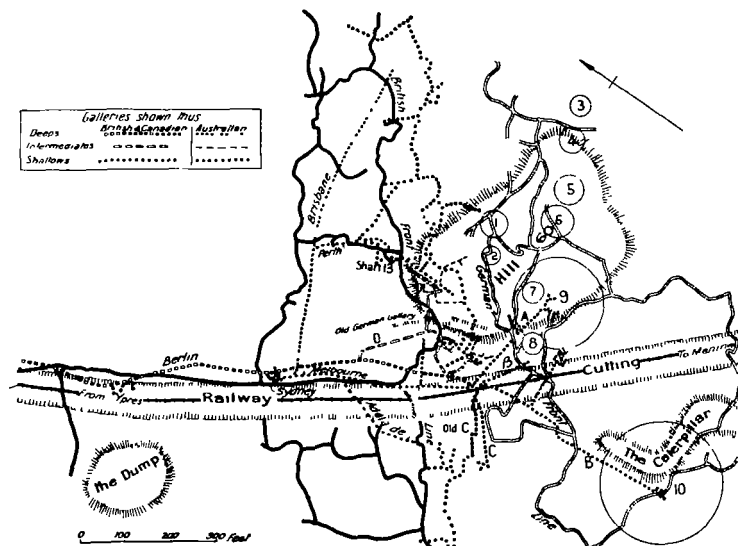
<sup>15</sup> Col. R. S. G. Stokes, D.S.O., O.B.E., M.C. Mining engineer; of Johannesburg, S. Africa; b. Windsor, Berks., Eng., 31 July, 1882.

<sup>16</sup> That is, as an example of good dug-out construction, to be shown to staffs of army and corps.

<sup>17</sup> The deep mines on the Ploegsteert front had been completed and charged before the Australian tunnellers arrived. In the other systems, at Trenches 88 and 121, German mining could constantly be heard.

The main task of the 1st Australian Tunnelling Company was to keep intact the two great mines. Both the drainage of the galleries and their ventilation urgently needed improvement, and the company's first task was to effect this by sinking a deep metal-lined shaft 460 feet from the main junction, and driving from its bottom a new and much closer approach. Once these were finished a new deep system was to expand from them, and as part of that expansion it

### New "deep" system begun



Only ten of the many craters are here shown, namely—1 and 2, blown by French in 1914-15; 3-8, blown by British before the attack of 17 April, 1915; 9 and 10, craters of the Hill 60, and Caterpillar mines, 7 June, 1917.

was intended—much to the satisfaction of the Australians—to drive an additional gallery to undermine the German line ("The Snout") to the left of Hill 60, 1,400 feet away. The shaft was later named "Sydney," the drive leading from it "Melbourne," the defensive galleries on either side of this "Adelaide" and "Perth" (and later extensions, "Newcastle" and "Hobart"), and the long offensive gallery "Brisbane."<sup>18</sup> In addition, many shallow works—dugouts and approach-tunnels for attacking infantry—had to be provided or brought to completion.

But, while these improved defences were being prepared, the Germans had constantly to be shouldered away from the great mines, a task involving endless fighting in the existing shallow and intermediate systems. The left branch of the intermediates from which no sound of German mining could at first be heard,<sup>19</sup> was

### Noises in the "deeps"

<sup>18</sup> One of the shafts of the shallow system was already known as "Anzac," this name having been given to it by the British or Canadian miners long before.

<sup>19</sup> Sounds of mining were indeed heard there, but it was recognised that these came from Australian miners working not far away in "shallows," where a new gallery was being driven to provide more direct communication.

cautiously extended, but its right branch, close to the Hill 60 gallery, was stationary, the Germans being very near. All the listeners at their posts in the neighbouring shallow and intermediate galleries could hear the Germans mining in some neighbouring workings, but in the "deeps" the sounds were at this time only faint and distant. On November 29th, however, Lieutenant Carroll,<sup>20</sup> listening from a short defensive gallery (known as "B Left") which was being pushed out from the left of The Caterpillar mine gallery ("B"),<sup>21</sup> reported that he could hear men walking in some neighbouring workings. Captain Avery,<sup>22</sup> in charge of the section of the company then in the mine, immediately stopped work on the "face" (the head of the gallery) and himself clearly heard the Germans driving nails and chiselling wood to the left front of the branch gallery, but at least fifty feet away. Reports were sent at once to Second Army headquarters that the Germans were at work between the two great mine galleries. It was decided to continue tunnelling towards the sounds of their activity, but with great care and with frequent intervals for listening.

On December 2nd, when the branch gallery was 103 feet "in" from the main one, hammering was again heard, and on the 5th Captain McBride's<sup>23</sup> section reported loud knocking **Blow of Dec. 19** and boring above and to the left. That evening a slight fall of earth occurred in the Australian tunnel, and the Australian listener immediately afterwards heard someone running back along the German gallery almost overhead. To make certain of heading the enemy off, the branch gallery was very cautiously continued with a slight bend to the right, but ten days later Captain Woodward<sup>24</sup> and Lieutenant Clinton,<sup>25</sup> confirming the warnings of their listeners, heard the enemy "hard at work" and earth falling within twenty feet of them. The company commander, Major Henry,<sup>26</sup> after himself listening, ordered the nearest part of the gallery to be at once silently loaded. While the charge—2,500 lb. of ammonal—was being put in, the Germans could easily be heard "with the naked ear." So close were they working that the vibration kept shaking down flakes of clay on to the tin containers of the ammonal, which had therefore to be covered with sandbags. Woodward reported the situation "critical" and at 2 o'clock on the 19th, when the Germans were probably ten feet away, the charge was fired. It was reported that no crater was made in the surface; the charge must have blown its way through the German workings, for smoke issued a few minutes later from some shaft or other channel behind the German lines.

<sup>20</sup> Capt H. H. Carroll, M.C.; 1st Tun. Coy. Mining engineer student, of Broken Hill, N.S.W.; b. Taradale, Vic., 24 April, 1892.

<sup>21</sup> The Canadians had begun this defensive work, but the Australians took it over when 41 feet "in."

<sup>22</sup> Capt. W. P. Avery, 1st Tun. Coy. Mining engineer, of Brisbane; b. Mackay, Q'land, 5 Dec., 1886. Killed in action, 25 April, 1917.

<sup>23</sup> Capt. W. J. McBride, M.C.; 1st Tun. Co. Metallurgist; of Prospect, S. Aust.; b. Glenelg, S. Aust., 18 Feb., 1879.

<sup>24</sup> Capt. O. H. Woodward, M.C.; 1st Tun. Coy. Mining and metallurgical engineer; of Tenterfield, N.S.W.; b. Tenterfield, 8 Oct., 1885.

<sup>25</sup> Capt. R. A. Clinton, M.C.; 2nd Fld. Coy., Engrs. Mining engineer; of Ballarat, Vic.; b. Ballarat, Vic., 25 Oct., 1879. Died, 9 May, 1936.

<sup>26</sup> Major J. Douglas Henry, D.S.O., O.B.E. Commanded 1st Tun. Co., 1916/17. Mining engineer; of Indooroopilly, Q'land; b. Clermont, Q'land, 26 May, 1881.

It is now known from German sources<sup>27</sup> that this "blow" destroyed the deep workings which the enemy had been slowly sinking through a difficult watery stratum. The German **German account** mining at Hill 60 had been controlled by the section engineer, Lieutenant-Colonel Fusslein, who, though he had improvised both his organisation and his tunnelling companies, was satisfied that the British had been outwitted and outworked. The staff of the 204th Division, however, to which he gave this assurance, was much disturbed by this blow on December 19th well behind their lines as well as by similar destructive explosions in neighbouring sectors on the 11th and 21st. The German troops seem to have been assured that some of these were due to the accidental firing of German explosives,<sup>28</sup> but the staff was aware of the truth. Nevertheless, efforts to mine deeply appear to have been, for the time being, abandoned.

On the night after this explosion Australian listeners in all the shallow workings near the right branch of the "intermediates" could hear the enemy busily moving, and it was assumed that he was repairing his shaken galleries. Half-an-hour after midnight, however, the Germans blew a *camouflet* there, wrecking part of the nearest shallow gallery and killing a listener there and breaking many timbers in the deep galleries. Major Henry had a few hours previously ordered his mining officers to discover and tunnel towards a German gallery which was known to exist at about the "intermediate" level, with a view to entering and capturing it.<sup>29</sup> The left-hand branch of the "intermediates" had been pushed forward searching for it, and, as this drive ("D Left") approached the German line, the enemy could be heard at work. But, although numerous bores were put out for 15-20 feet in all likely directions, the enemy's workings were not found. With another twenty feet this gallery would have passed below the German front trench, but at this point on December 17th it had run into earth so loose and treacherous that its end was lost and the face had to be boarded up. The search for the German gallery was then continued from the right branch of the "intermediates." Here, as the Germans were always close, it was decided to put out two bore-holes from the "shallows," and to fire a small charge in each with the object of either breaking down any German gallery ahead or, at least, of causing the enemy to disclose his position. But the ground was very broken,<sup>30</sup> a chaos of old mine-galleries and broken timbers, the debris of constant explosions, and the bores caved in. Nor could the right "intermediate" ("D Right") find this gallery. The Germans were constantly detected from the neighbouring "shallows"; Sapper Sneddon<sup>31</sup> reported them dragging boxes

<sup>27</sup> *History of the 204th Division*, and researches courteously permitted by the *Reichsarchiv*.

<sup>28</sup> The history of the 120th I.R., which occupied a neighbouring sector, states that its troops, through conversation with miners, came to suspect that they were undermined.

<sup>29</sup> At this time the 1st Tunnelling Company had 220 men of the 47th and 23rd Divisions and 85 of the 171st Tunnelling Company attached. Its own strength was 516.

<sup>30</sup> Elsewhere an old mine-shaft with an abandoned windlass, and an old Canadian gallery, were discovered by the Australian tunnellers.

<sup>31</sup> Sapper J. B. Sneddon (No. 282; 1st Tun. Coy.). Coal miner; of Wallsend, N.S.W., b. Gilmerton, Scotland, 27 Oct., 1869. Killed in action, 7 April, 1917. (Sneddon's son, Sapper W. F. Sneddon, was also serving in the 1st Tunnelling Company.)



on sledges, moving, scraping, shovelling, boring (the grind of the cutter in sand could be clearly heard and even the dragging of sand out of the bore-hole), stopping to listen, and then boring again very cautiously. But "D Right" could not find any gallery, and on January 11th finished, as intended, against the timbers of an old German mine-shaft close above the deep gallery to Hill 60.<sup>32</sup>

By that time the Australian mining officers were convinced that the Germans, near whose line the majority of the old mine-craters lay, were boring from one of the crater-posts to destroy the Australian "shallows." In this area, full of the debris and poisonous gas of old explosions, German galleries would have been difficult to create and maintain—the mere belt of gassed earth was a protection to the Australian "shallows"; but boring from the craters was a swift, accurate method, most difficult to counter. Captain Woodward suggested that the suspected crater should be blown up by a "kick" from the right intermediate; but the authorities were anxious to avoid increasing activity in the neighbourhood of the deep workings, which at present were not themselves threatened, and it was therefore decided merely to bombard the crater with trench-mortars. An arrangement was accordingly made with the infantry by which, if the tunnellers sent the message "Hindenburg," medium trench-mortars would immediately fire into this nest. An attempt was also made to put in small bore-hole charges from the nearest Australian "shallows," but again the shattered condition of the ground rendered the process difficult. Meanwhile the sounds of German work gradually passed the point in the "shallows" which at first seemed to be threatened, and no immediate "blow" occurred. On February 21st, when the 47th Division carried out a raid, two small Australian mines were blown from the "shallows" as a feint, and three days later the Germans fired a *camouflet* near the same point with little effect.<sup>33</sup> They were still continually heard at work. On March 21st they "blew" near the canal cutting, damaging both front lines and killing an infantryman, but not affecting any Australian workings. On March 24th they fired a mine farther to the left, probably on hearing some of the Australians tunnelling in the "shallows" in preparation for another raid by the 47th Division. The Germans fired again on the 27th. They had been heard boring from their crater near the point of greatest activity, and the usual message had been sent to the trench-mortars. But the sounds of their work ceased only while the mortars were firing. An Australian listening post was crushed; two men were killed;<sup>34</sup> and the shallow galleries near the crater, though not much broken in, were now so rickety that even a slight "blow" would destroy them. They could only be used for listening, and on March 31st Sapper Sneddon, having clearly heard the Germans boring and then charging the bore-hole, temporarily withdrew his men. As no

<sup>32</sup> Where silence was required, tunnelling was done with the bayonet, necessarily a slow method.

<sup>33</sup> One listener suffered from shock. It was thought that the Germans had put in a borehole from the crater formed on February 21. They again fired a very weak *camouflet* on March 8.

<sup>34</sup> The blow on the left entombed an Australian listener, Sapper J. T. Landrigan (Broadwater, N.S.W.), but, after an hour's desperate digging, his comrades rescued him. By the later blow from the crater Sapper T. Hutchison (Balgonic, Markinch, Fife, Scotland, and Kurri Kurri, N.S.W.) and Private C. R. Couves (Plaistow, Essex, Eng.), an attached worker of the 19th London Regiment, were killed.

"blow" followed, Major Henry suggested that means might be devised of simulating work while the gallery was empty, so that the enemy might fire his charge uselessly. Before this was done, however, early on April 7th the Germans fired their mine, crushing the rickety gallery and killing Sapper Sneddon,<sup>35</sup> who was listening there.

The defence of these "shallows" was now so hampered by friable ground and débris, which prevented boring, that it was decided to establish another defensive system beneath them, by prolonging and raising the right and left "inter-mediate" and joining them so as to form a defensive apron below the "shallows." A still deeper set of defensive galleries for the protection of the great mines had also been continuously pushed forward. Their earlier defences, both right and central, had been destroyed by a Canadian *camouflet* and by the Australian *camouflet* of December 19th. After the German "blow" which followed the latter, two of the three electric leads to the Hill 60 mine had been found to be broken.<sup>36</sup> The mine had to be partly untamped to reach and repair the break, and on January 16th, listening in the reopened gallery, Sergeant Stevenson<sup>37</sup> caught the distinct sound of enemy work.<sup>38</sup> Captain Avery, after himself listening on January 22nd, reported that it was difficult as yet to interpret this noise. Lieutenant Bowry<sup>39</sup> heard a "set" of timber being noisily put in, but it was suspected that the Germans were merely making dugouts in their trenches above. Careful listening, however, continued, and Captain Anderson,<sup>40</sup> temporarily commanding the company, ordered that new defensive galleries should be immediately driven from the right and centre of the old deep system. The entrance of the old British "C" gallery on the right was opened and a new gallery thrust out. After it had been tunnelled for 100 feet, Germans were heard working cautiously some distance away. The Australian miners drove it carefully forward, but at 194 feet, when working through the area of the earlier blows, ran into slushy ground and, although in March they broke off twice to the right, could not get through. The central defensive gallery<sup>41</sup> also had to be cautiously driven, enemy sounds being heard, and here, on March 18th, at 124 feet there oozed through the "face" poisonous gas, evidently a relic of the December *camouflet*.<sup>42</sup> The ground ahead resembled quicksand and, notwithstanding attempts to continue, the work had to be stopped.

<sup>35</sup> The same evening, in connection with a raid by the 47th Division, the Australians exploded the mine prepared for covering this raid.

<sup>36</sup> The wires were found to give no deflection when tested by the galvanometer.

<sup>37</sup> Staff-Sgt. J. C. Stevenson (No. 289; 1st Tun. Coy.). Miner; b. Tranent, Scotland, 1887.

<sup>38</sup> 143 feet of the gallery had been reopened, and the last break in the wires discovered and repaired, but the gallery was being kept open to this point until the cause of certain noises heard from the right of the "intermediates" had been definitely ascertained. Sergeant T. S. Keen (Canbelago, N.S.W.; died Jan. 1926) had on January 11 reported the Germans working near "D Right," and Lieutenant D. Yates (Adelaide) and Captain W. P. Avery (Brisbane) confirmed this, hearing the Germans using the push-pick, the earth falling and bags being dragged away.

<sup>39</sup> Capt. J. Bowry, 1st Tun. Coy. Mine manager; of Charters Towers, Q'land, b. Kennedy, Charters Towers, 31 July, 1887. Died, 9 March, 1936.

<sup>40</sup> Lieut.-Col. E. S. Anderson, M.C. Commanded 1st Tun. Coy., 1917/19. Mining engineer and metallurgist, of Hay, N.S.W.. b. Hughenden, Q'land, 15 May, 1890.

<sup>41</sup> Known as "Beta" The right was known as "C"

<sup>42</sup> Its site was then sixty feet away, in the branch gallery of The Caterpillar tunnel. The white mice, by which the air was tested, did not die.

At this stage the new Australian deep-mining system was beginning rapidly to develop. In the early stages progress was so slow<sup>43</sup> as to bring a protest from G.H.Q., but the speed quickly increased and on March 17th the new deep approach-gallery "Melbourne" holed through<sup>44</sup> into the junction of the two great mines, the ventilation there being instantly improved, and the work of drainage enormously reduced.<sup>45</sup> Farther back the two branch galleries ("Brisbane" and "Adelaide") were opening out. "Brisbane" gallery had 1,400 feet to go before reaching the intended position of the mine under the "Snout," and a crack team from each section of the company was accordingly put on there and was promised leave when the work finished. For three weeks they drove nearly fifteen feet a day, and then word was received that the gallery must be finished by May 31st. Its direction was slightly altered, so that the German line would be reached sooner, and a minimum of eighteen feet a day was called for. But this average, though surpassed during one week, could not be kept up.<sup>46</sup> On May 9th, when the gallery at 750 feet was passing under No-Man's Land, the change of high policy, by which the attack in Flanders was ordered for June 7th, rendered it impossible to finish the gallery in time and the project was therefore abandoned.<sup>47</sup> The Australian clay-kickers were transferred to the two deep defensive galleries of their system ("Adelaide" and "Perth") to drive these<sup>48</sup> forward at full speed.

The urgency of this defensive measure was due to the noises in the half-untamped Hill 60 gallery having changed their character. On April 5th Lieutenant Hinder,<sup>49</sup> listening at the tamping, heard the Germans working a winch in some neighbouring shaft which, by the sounds, seemed to be lined with metal. Four days later the enemy raided the British trenches, evidently searching for mines.<sup>50</sup>

He penetrated over 200 yards into the lines, remained there for an hour, blew in the entrances of some of the shallow infantry "subways," and captured five Australian tunnellers who had been driven from their work by the cessation of the pumps.<sup>51</sup> The damage on the surface was extensive,<sup>52</sup> but, except for impeded ventilation, the

<sup>43</sup> Partly in consequence of difficulties in opening out with steel caissons to get through the running sand bed. When once solid clay was reached it was possible to use timber "sets," the work being thus rendered simpler and quicker.

<sup>44</sup> The work had been begun by picking, but this could be heard so far ahead that the method had to be abandoned. "Clay-kicking" was normally used, except in galleries very close to the enemy, or when tunnelling uphill.

<sup>45</sup> The water now flowed by gravitation to a sump at the bottom of the new shaft and was pumped from there. This released ten sets of pumps—sixty men daily.

<sup>46</sup> The average was a little over fourteen feet. Ventilation became bad, work was interrupted by an enemy raid, and by bombardments, and, as the German line was approached, by occasional listening.

<sup>47</sup> "I very much regret the decision," wrote the Controller of Mines, Second Army, Lieutenant-Colonel A. G. Stevenson, R.E., "especially after the good progress made and keenness shown by your company, but it cannot be helped."

<sup>48</sup> And also a new connection between the "deeps" and "intermediates," "Ipswich."

<sup>49</sup> Major R. B. Hinder, M.C.; 1st Tun. Coy. Mining engineer; of Mosman, N.S.W.; b. Maitland East, N.S.W., 29 June, 1891.

<sup>50</sup> The raid happened to be made during a British divisional relief, the 23rd relieving the 47th. The 47th had made their raid upon the Germans two days before, and simultaneously with this raid the Australians had blown two *camouflets* in the "shallows." These were fired a few hours after the Germans blew the *camouflet* which crushed the rickety gallery and killed Sapper Sneddon.

<sup>51</sup> They were trying to dig out Sapper Sneddon, when rising water drove them from their posts. On going out they were bombed and captured.

<sup>52</sup> Twenty-five British infantrymen in one of the subways were asphyxiated by gas from one of the German demolition charges, despite a fine effort by the Australian "proto-men," Sappers F. J. Sheriffs and O. Palmer, to guide them

"deeps" were not interfered with.<sup>53</sup> Close attention to the sounds near the Hill 60 mine continued. Both the great mine-galleries were partly untamped to allow better listening. After each enemy "blow" listeners naturally tended to hear imaginary work. "Listeners all a bit windy," Captain Avery had reported. The sounds were often made by broken earth or timbers settling, or by water dropping. "Gas oozing out of slurry can give almost any mining sound." But the sound of work near the Hill 60 mine was definite. Corporal Gough,<sup>54</sup> listening, reported his belief that the German winch was bailing water from a shaft.

It is too constant to be hauling dirt, for they could not break enough to keep it up . . . The outfit must be very old by the creaking when pulling.

Captain Pollock,<sup>55</sup> in charge of the army school of mines, and Lieutenant Clarke<sup>56</sup> (an expert Canadian listener) on April 17th determined the direction of the sound, and judged it eighty feet away. A branch gallery was therefore started from the Hill 60 gallery and pushed cautiously towards it.<sup>57</sup> At the same time the fighting was constant elsewhere in the area in which the two branches of the "intermediates" were now feeling towards one another. In the right branch the Australians blew two *camouflets* on April 18th, to which the enemy replied with one on the 19th and two on the 20th.<sup>58</sup> In the left on April 24th the listener heard the footsteps of a German approach so close that, thinking the man was coming down his gallery, he blew out his light. The sound passed six feet overhead. The gallery was at once loaded and was fired on May 17th when the Germans were very close.

In the deep Hill 60 gallery on May 9th the enemy was so near that work was stopped, and the branch gallery was loaded with 1,600 lb. of ammonal. The Germans had evidently completed their shaft and were driving a gallery past the end of the branch gallery. As, however, there was now only a month to go, and the *camouflet* might detonate the great mine, or at least cause the Germans to probe vigorously, it was decided that the safest course was to accept the risk involved in letting the enemy work on, and not to fire the *camouflet* unless he touched the actual timbers of its gallery. The Germans could now be heard putting in timber, working a truck, walking, and even talking. On May 25th in some other workings they fired a mine whose position was "dangerously correct," directly above the Hill 60 gallery. It crushed in the junction of the galleries and entombed two listeners. One, Sapper Earl,<sup>59</sup> in the Hill 60

clear. Sergeant E. A. Bennett was killed, and Lieutenants H. H. Carroll and W. S. Jones gassed, while on rescue work (Sheriffs belonged to Sydney; Palmer, who died on 24 Feb., 1919, to Temora, N.S.W.; Bennett to Mosman, N.S.W.; Carroll to Broken Hill, N.S.W.; and Jones, who died on 30 Aug., 1928, to Brisbane.)

<sup>53</sup> Steps had been taken to camouflage, and if necessary to destroy, entrances, but the demolition wires were cut by the German bombardment.

<sup>54</sup> Sgt. F. B. Gough (No. 3300; 1st Tun. Coy.). Miner; of Brisbane; b. Gympie, Q'land, 18 June, 1887.

<sup>55</sup> Major J. A. Pollock, Aust. Mining Bn. Professor of Physics in University of Sydney, 1899-1922; b. Douglas, Co. Cork, Ireland, 17 Nov., 1865. Died 24 May, 1922.

<sup>56</sup> Lieut. R. F. Clarke, M.C.; 3rd Canadian Tun. Coy. Land surveyor; of Ontario, Canada; b. Woodstock, Ontario, 19 July, 1881.

<sup>57</sup> About this time, on April 25, apparently by the premature firing of a super-sensitive detonator, which was being tested by officers in the company's advanced headquarters, Captain W. P. Avery and Lieutenants A. E. Tandy (Ballarat, Vic.) and G. D. Evans (Randwick, N.S.W.) were killed, and seven batmen asphyxiated. Corporal J. W. Saxton (Galong, N.S.W.), one of the proto-men, was buried and killed when trying to reach them.

<sup>58</sup> On the 20th Sapper D. M. Blair (Seaham, N.S.W.) was killed.

<sup>59</sup> Spr. E. W. Earl (No. 3597; 1st Tun. Coy.). Labourer; of Geelong, Vic.; b. Darrivill, Sutherland's Creek, Vic., 21 Oct., 1888. Died 28 July, 1917.

gallery, coolly went on listening and heard a German walk down an enemy gallery apparently directly over the great mine. Both listeners were rescued,<sup>60</sup> but their signals, or sounds of the rescue parties, were possibly heard, for the German work became more cautious.

The blow had shaken the mine galleries and broken one of the Caterpillar leads, but after this had been repaired it was decided merely to strengthen the galleries by tamping, and to stop all other forward work that might be heard by enemy listeners. The Germans could be heard

### **The last stage**

continually working towards the Hill 60 mine, but the time was now approaching for the final preparations of the attack. First, the subway system had to be handed over to the incoming infantry. In that system the company had achieved a record for speed, 41 feet of 6 by 3 foot subway having been driven through the clay in twenty-four hours, and 212 feet in a week. To withstand the great blow, all the forward works were now strengthened with struts and partial tamping. The very extensive infantry galleries and dugouts were lined with benches, and the traffic control men were instructed in their duty in this labyrinth. In the mines on June 3rd the enemy "blew" near his own lines, but the Australian galleries were undamaged. The German winch could still be heard at the point of danger, but the deep *camouflet* never had to be fired. On June 3rd came the order to retamp the Hill 60 gallery. The listeners had to be withdrawn, and from then onwards the staff could only trust that the enemy would not reach the British workings before the mine was fired. Constant tests of the leads up to the last moment showed that he had not yet interfered with them, and at 3.10 on June 7th the great mines were sent up. That at Hill 60 made a crater 60 feet deep and 260 feet wide; that at the Caterpillar a crater 90 feet deep and 334 feet wide.<sup>61</sup>

German records show that in the raid of April 9th a serious attempt had been made with 600 men to explore and destroy the British mine-system.<sup>62</sup> As a destructive measure, the raid was worthless, and it is probable that never again will a combatant place much reliance upon this method of avoiding the danger of mines. But the enemy did discover evidence of deep mining. Although the prisoners appear to have held their tongues, a sample of earth brought back proved that the British must have sunk a sap far below the level of the German workings. The enemy had accordingly pushed on with a deep shaft, using concrete in getting through the soft stratum which had previously impeded him. But before he reached the British galleries the great mines were blown. The 204th German Division lost 10 officers and 677 men killed by the explosions. That at the Caterpillar wrecked the second line as well as the front.

<sup>60</sup> It was at first believed that Earl had been buried, but, on the day after the explosion, Sapper G. Goodwin (Guildford, N.S.W.), at work clearing the debris, heard his signals, cautiously given, thirty feet away. Earl had written to his mother, made his will, and continued to listen at the tamping. He could hear the signals of the other entombed listener, Sapper G. Simpson (Chatswood, N.S.W.), in Beta gallery, and after his own signals had been heard he gave no more, for fear of disclosing the position of the mine, but went to the end of his gallery and slept. The rescue party, under Sergeants H. Fraser (Forbes, N.S.W.) and J. C. Stevenson, reached him on the 27th, when he handed in his written report (which is now in the Australian War Memorial). He was suffering from the effects of asphyxia, and died three months later from the results. (Fraser, after gaining a commission in the 3rd Fld. Coy, Engrs, died of wounds on 31 May, 1918.)

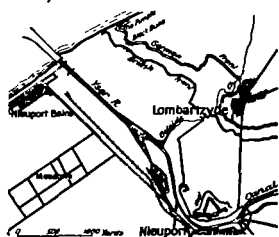
<sup>61</sup> Measured at the crest of the rim. The actual holes in the ground were 50 by 204, and 72 by 273, feet respectively. (See Vol XII, plates 328-9.)

<sup>62</sup> The Germans fired 22,840 shells in this operation.

## APPENDIX No. 2

### THE 2ND TUNNELLING COMPANY IN THE AFFAIR AT NIEUPOORT<sup>1</sup>

In 1917 the Allied line on the coast still lay along the Yser, the small river<sup>2</sup> along which the Belgians and French in 1914 held back the extreme right flank of the German advance. The Belgian Army still held the flooded lowlands along it from Dixmude to within a few miles of the sea. Near the sea it traversed the zone of sandhills which, before the war, had been studded with bathing resorts, each neighbouring village on the meadows having at least some mushroom watering place—a few terraced blocks and many speculative building plots—along the shore. Thus the small Belgian port of Nieuport, on the Yser, had its corresponding Nieuport Bains, on the dunes south-west of the river-mouth. In this sector, which the French had never entrusted to Belgians or British, they held beyond the river a small foothold, very narrow on the dunes, but slightly deeper in the meadow-flats, where it reached the outskirts of the village of Lombartzyde.



In order that the offensive at Ypres should be assisted in its final stage by a coastal attack<sup>3</sup> the French agreed to hand over the sector to the Fourth British Army under General Rawlinson. The XV British Corps accordingly took over from the XXXVI French Corps on June 20th. British staff officers, visiting the French headquarters before the change, had ascertained that the sector would not be an easy one to attack from, as, except for a few concrete shelters and the numerous well-sited observation-posts of the French artillery, no safe shelter existed there. The trench parapets were in places only three feet thick, and the head of the British mining service, Brigadier-General Harvey,<sup>4</sup> who on June 6th enquired into the deep digging, reported:

"I find that the French have done none, and the C.R.E., 29th (French) Division, says that the Germans have not done any either. There has been no mine warfare. Neither side have been able to cope with the difficulties of the sand in the dunes and the waterlogged nature of the ground further south (i.e., in the meadow)."

The Fourth Army's project was a difficult one—a thrust from the narrow foothold beyond the Yser, and a simultaneous landing of one division on the coast; and General Rawlinson was particularly anxious to help it by undermining a prominent German strong-point in the dunes; Australian miners, and probably others, had assured General Harvey that they were accustomed to tunnel through sandy drift, and he concluded his report:

"It may be possible to drive a mine gallery under the Grande Dune. This work will be attended with great difficulty and will be slow, but

<sup>1</sup> See p. 701.

<sup>2</sup> Formed by all the small streams flowing from the Mount Kemmel-Passchendaele semicircle.

<sup>3</sup> See p. 695

<sup>4</sup> Major-Gen. R. N. Harvey, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O. Inspector of Mines, G.H.Q., B.E.F., 1916/17; Chief Engineer, VI Corps, 1918/19; Engineer-in-Chief, India, 1924/28. Officer of British Regular Army; of London; b. Clifton, Glos., Eng., 17 May 1868. Died, 15 Feb. 1937.

with care, and the right sort of men, I think . . . it is worth while to make a trial . . .

"I would be prepared to recommend that half a tunnelling company be detailed . . . to make a real trial of the possibility of mining in the dunes. The company selected should be one accustomed to working in soft ground, and I recommend either 171st Company, R.E., or 2nd Australian Tunnelling Company . . ."

The Australian company was chosen, and was sent to report to the 29th French Division, and made a preliminary experiment on the beach at Coxyde Bains a few miles behind the front. This was completely successful and, on the 1st British Division relieving the French, work was at once begun in the small area of sand dune held by the British beyond the Yser.

The British dune area beyond the river was only 600 yards deep by a mile wide. Bordering the beach a long dune ran through the British into the German line; and 250 yards inland another, known as

the "Black Dune," also ran curving across No-Man's Land, the two enclosing a curiously circular flat which had formed part of a well-known golf-links. Any digging in the level sand almost immediately ran into water; but by tunnelling into the dunes, and keeping a few inches above water-level, 15 or 20 feet of head-cover could be obtained, and the German strong-points on those dunes might be undermined. The Australians at once began tunnelling from an entrance near the beach. But the work was immediately seen and shelled, and the shafts had therefore to

be sunk from a support trench. The German line was only 80 yards from the British on the seaside dune, and 65 yards at the Black Dune, but the seaside tunnel had to be driven 160 yards and the Black Dune tunnel about 230 (on an angular course following the dune), to reach their objective. In addition, two underground communication trenches and a safe battalion headquarters for the infantry were begun, and, on the near side of the river, several dugouts for reserves and some wells.<sup>6</sup>

The Australian miners of the 2nd Company, like those of the 1st and 3rd, were, on the average, older than most infantrymen, but were marked by a capacity for very fast work and a willingness to take great risks. The company, 566 strong, had been increased by the attachment of 160 of its reinforcements and working parties of 500 British infantry. Three-quarters of this force worked beyond the Yser, and, within two and a half weeks, their tunnels were approaching No-Man's Land and General Harvey's doubts had been dispelled. In addition the battalion headquarters was practically completed, and one underground communication trench<sup>7</sup> had gone 100 yards with five entrances at intervals, and was being simultaneously worked on at several points farther ahead.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> A British tunnelling company, the 257th, was at a later stage attached to the 32nd Division in the inland sector at Nieuport and the meadows, to work on dugouts for the infantry there.

<sup>7</sup> This was begun as a 6 feet by 4 feet gallery, but changed, on General Harvey's suggestion, to 6 by 3.

<sup>8</sup> The great danger of the face falling in was avoided by driving spiling ahead of the work and boarding up the face, except the portion worked on.

The Germans, by raiding, had discovered the presence of the British in this sector on the day after the XV Corps took over. The 1st and 32nd Divisions for three weeks vigorously strengthened the thin parapets, but protection was still badly wanting when, on July 8th, General Rawlinson and the staff of the Fourth Army assumed control. The French artillery had been relieved, but only 176 of the 636 British guns for Rawlinson's offensive had yet arrived. Among the heavy artillery in position was the headquarters of the Australian Siege Artillery Brigade (36th H.A.G.) and one of its two batteries, the 54th.<sup>8</sup> The 3rd, 6th, and 12th Australian "Army" Brigades were among the field artillery due to arrive a few days later. The artillery had orders to fire as little as possible for fear of warning the Germans as to the project, but German activity was noticeably increasing. On several nights Dunkirk, the northernmost of the French Channel ports, twenty miles in rear, had been bombed by German aeroplanes, and a big naval gun<sup>9</sup> at Leugenboom had at intervals thrown 14-inch shells into the town. It was thought that the Germans were retaliating for the increased activity of the British infantry. The British artillery replied, without disclosing its full strength.

But at day-break on July 10th the German fire, instead of diminishing, increased. By 6.45 it was intense, and, although sometimes it appeared here or there to ease, it lay in general all day on the whole area. German naval guns barraged the Fourth Army's communications for miles back. Telephone lines were quickly cut. One by one the three narrow floating bridges, which were the only means of access to the 1st Division's front beyond the Yser, were sunk or cut adrift. Only rare pigeon messages now arrived from the inferno beyond the river.<sup>10</sup>

At 11 a.m. the British artillery was ordered to cast aside its concealment and shell the enemy's supposed approaches and points of assembly. Many batteries were themselves under heavy fire. The 54th (Australian) Siege Battery had three of its four howitzers put out of action, but it continued to fire the fourth gun, the men lying down as much as possible between the rounds. Some batteries suffered through the enemy's use, for the first time, of what was to become his most dreaded gas-shell—"which smells," notes the diary of the 36th H.A.G., "like new mixed mustard."<sup>11</sup> The British Air Force, which also had had orders not to disclose its strength, was not able to protect its army this day, and German aeroplanes had it all their own way, flying low after the British fashion, and shooting to barrage the bridges.

About 7 in the evening it was evident to observers stationed southwest of the river that a change had come over the action. Shortly afterwards they saw groups of Germans crossing the area in rear of the British front, here and there deploying as if under fire. About 8 the Germans appeared close to the river, and were seen fighting near a headquarters there. Hours later, at dusk, a few men who had swum

<sup>8</sup> This battery, however, was under another headquarters.

<sup>9</sup> A 35-centimetre gun, similar to that captured by the Australians in 1918 east of Amiens.

<sup>10</sup> The 1st British Division had raided the German lines the night before and captured a prisoner, but killed him on the way back. Had he been brought in alive, the intention of the Germans to attack would doubtless have been discovered by the intelligence officers examining him.

<sup>11</sup> The same diary says: "The enemy was using a new gas-shell freely. Shell bursts like a small H.E. Gas makes you sneeze and run at the nose and eyes. Smell is like cayenne pepper." This actually was the "blue cross" shell, a different type from the mustard ("yellow cross") shell. Both new shells were used in this action.



the river, began to bring news. With others who crossed in the following nights, totalling about 80, they were all that escaped of two battalions of the 1st British Division and a section of Australian tunnellers in the dunes-sector beyond the river. The 32nd Division in the meadow-sector lost only its two front trenches, the German commander having decided not to attack the low ground behind them, since his opponents might be able to flood it.

The story of the 1st Division and the tunnellers is a short one. The sandbagged trenches had given little protection from the bombardment, and the infantry losses had been very severe; the Germans easily overran the position. The Australians and attached working parties in the tunnels were fairly secure, except where tunnels were broken in by *minenwerfer* shells; indeed, for some of these the first evidence of the attack was the non-arrival of reliefs to dig them out. Recognising then that they were cut off, Lieutenant Mortensen<sup>12</sup> and Corporal Dunn<sup>13</sup> with a dozen men in one of the tunnels barricaded the gallery and held out until dawn next morning, when the exhaustion of the air and its pollution by German smoke-bombs thrown from the sap-head forced them to surrender. In one of the tunnelled communication trenches, which served as headquarters of the left battalion, a number of British officers and men under Captain Smith<sup>14</sup> of the 2nd King's Royal Rifles<sup>15</sup> offered some resistance to Germans who penetrated thither, Sapper McGlinchey<sup>16</sup> of the tunnellers playing a leading part. Another tunneller, Sapper Minogue<sup>17</sup> fought the Germans with his rifle until wounded through thigh, abdomen, and ankle.

It was largely the survivors of this party who escaped across the river. As some could not swim, two Australians, Sappers Burke<sup>18</sup> and Coade<sup>19</sup> obtained a rope. Burke swam across with it and Coade remained to hold it taut while the non-swimmers escaped, and then followed them.<sup>20</sup> Of necessity the wounded were left; but when a party of Germans was seen working round the river bank, and it was explained to those in shelter that it was a case of swim or be captured, an Australian, Sapper O'Connell,<sup>21</sup> who lay there bandaged after fighting with bombs and being wounded and burnt with a *flammenwerfer*, to the surprise of everyone, stood up. He made his way across part of a broken bridge, and then swam across. As he climbed out he heard a British soldier in the water calling for help. He at once swam out again, brought the man in, and then fainted. Sergeant

<sup>12</sup> Lieut. W. M. Mortensen, 2nd Tun. Coy. Mining engineer; of Many Peaks, Q'land; b. Mt. Perry, Q'land, 20 Nov., 1888.

<sup>13</sup> Cpl. M. G. Dunn (No. 543; 2nd Tun. Coy.). Railway employee; of Ballarat, Vic.; b. Ballarat, 12 Jan., 1872. Died 1 July, 1928.

<sup>14</sup> Lieut.-Col. H. F. E. Smith, D.S.O.; 2nd Bn., King's Royal Rifle Corps, Officer of British Regular Army; of Tidworth, Hants., Eng.; b. Lexham, Norfolk, Eng., 28 April, 1888.

<sup>15</sup> The battalion commander went up to the front and did not return.

<sup>16</sup> Spr. C. G. McGlinchey (No. 2830; 2nd Tun. Coy.). Miner; of North Broken Hill, N.S.W.; b. Newcastle, N.S.W., 1885.

<sup>17</sup> Spr. P. Minogue (No. 3988; 2nd Tun. Coy.). Miner; of Bendigo and Little River, Vic.; b. Bendigo, Vic., 16 May, 1878.

<sup>18</sup> Spr. T. F. Burke, M.M. (No. 2441; 2nd Tun. Coy.). Miner; of Springdallah, Vic.; b. Allendale, Vic., 15 Oct., 1892.

<sup>19</sup> Spr. J. Coade, M.M. (No. 2442; 2nd Tun. Coy.). Coal miner; of Korumburra, Vic.; b. Malmesbury, Vic., 29 June, 1878. Killed in action, 9 April, 1918.

<sup>20</sup> McGlinchey, trying to escape at 1 a.m., ran into Germans and was captured.

<sup>21</sup> Spr. J. O'Connell, D.C.M. (No. 2432; 2nd Tun. Coy.). Horse driver; of Hunter's Hill, N.S.W.; b. Lismore, N.S.W., 24 Dec., 1887.

Birrell<sup>22</sup> and three other Australians<sup>23</sup> and a British working party, trapped by the falling in of a tunnel, dug themselves out by next morning only to find Germans in their rear. Their rifles had been destroyed and most of the infantrymen decided to surrender, but the four Australians and two of their British comrades asked the others to give them ten minutes' start before putting up the white flag. Though they were bombed by the Germans and Birrell was wounded, the six reached the river, but Germans followed them and, having no weapons, they were captured. Of 50 tunnellers beyond the river, only Lieutenant Hargraves<sup>24</sup> and the three men already mentioned escaped.<sup>25</sup>

It was now known that this attack was suggested by the Fourth German Army before the British relieved the French. The Allies' bridgehead at Nieuport, says Ludendorff, was the "weak spot" of the German Naval Corps, which held the coastal sector. The Fourth German Army desired to remedy this weakness before the British offensive at Ypres, but was uncertain whether it could get its stroke in first. It was temporarily furnished with a large force of artillery, and was permitted to use two new types of gas-shell which were being saved to resist the Ypres offensive.

The Nieuport bombardment began on the 6th. At dusk on the 10th the 3rd Marine Division attacked, captured the bridgehead in the dunes and 1,284 prisoners, and for the first time discovered the undermining operations.<sup>26</sup> The Germans suffered 700 casualties, mostly light wounds.

This German success still left the British with a bridgehead in the meadow-land, and their project was merely modified. It was now proposed to cross the river in boats<sup>27</sup> in conjunction with attacks from the meadow-land and from the sea; but, as the Ypres offensive never reached the stage for this co-operation, the project was eventually cancelled.

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<sup>22</sup> Sgt. F. Birrell (No. 492; 2nd Tun. Coy.). Miner; of Adelaide, b. Adelaide, 29 July, 1876.

<sup>23</sup> Sappers J. O'Neill, T. O'Neill, and L. G. Hinds. (The O'Neills belonged to East Fremantle, W. Aust., and Hinds to Beaconsfield, Tas.)

<sup>24</sup> Lieut. E. P. Hargraves, 2nd Tun. Coy. Consulting mining engineer; of Melbourne; b. Auckland, N.Z., 23 Aug., 1877.

<sup>25</sup> The company lost only one man killed; 4 officers and 3 others were wounded; 1 officer and 41 others were missing (a few of these were wounded).

<sup>26</sup> The diary of the 3rd Marine Division, which mentions the discovery, does not do so until July 14, and then speaks only of the seaward gallery. It is possible that the German staff never learnt of the existence of the second gallery.

<sup>27</sup> The coastal landing was to be made by the 1st Division, but the river crossing by a new division, the 66th. (The Germans guessed that the operation was still projected, as the British still kept two divisions in the line, which had previously been held by one French division.) The Fourth Army intended to use the Australian tunnellers to carry material to the bridges that were to be thrown over the Yser. Although they would have made a determined carrying party, they were not intended for such employment, and Major E. N. Mulligan (Double Bay, N.S.W.) protested and was supported by General Birdwood.

## APPENDIX No 3

### WORK OF 3RD TUNNELLING COMPANY AT HILL 70<sup>1</sup>

On the 13th of April, 1917, four days after the Canadian Corps captured Vimy Heights, the Sixth German Army drew back from part of its line which had been left dangerously projecting in front of Lens, north of the Canadian attack. This retirement hinged upon Hill 70, a mile and a half north-west of Lens. A British attack, intended to thrust back the hinge from Hill 70, failed. The result was that the extensive German mining system at Hill 70 now lay beneath the old German positions occupied by the British. It was believed that the Germans still had access to this system, and the task of protecting the infantry against the possible blowing up of the system fell to the 3rd Australian Tunnelling Company.

It will be remembered that this company (a Western Australian unit with a proportion of Tasmanians) had taken part in the Battle of Fromelles.<sup>2</sup> In November 1916 it was ordered to extend its activity southward to include the mines at Hill 70 (in the I Corps sector), where the Germans were mining actively and aggressively.<sup>3</sup> The ground here was entirely white chalk rock;<sup>4</sup> the British galleries were untimbered, but the Germans timbered theirs. Comparatively little was then known as to the position of the German galleries, and in taking their first steps to fight down the enemy the Australians had to work to a large extent in the dark. This led to immediate disaster. On November 27th, when a mine had been charged and was about to be tamped for explosion, the Germans blew a *camouflet* which exploded the Australian charge, killing 20 miners and gassing Lieutenant Russel<sup>5</sup> and 8 other ranks.<sup>6</sup> Next day the Germans blew again, killing two Australian miners.<sup>7</sup>

The marked feature of the struggle that followed was the way in which the Australian tunnellers, after hitting back on November 29th with a maximum *camouflet* in the deep workings, steadily persisted with their effort in face of these casualties. An inspecting officer from G.H.Q., Major Stokes, noted that this company surveyed and excavated the lines of its galleries "more consistently and accurately than I have seen practised in any other company." A serious gap existed in the defensive system; and part of the work—for example, the chambering of the "Seaforth" main fighting gallery—was known to be thoroughly risky. After several "blows" by the Australians, the Germans tried to crush that gallery with a *camouflet* on December

<sup>1</sup> See p. 728

<sup>2</sup> See Vol. III, pp. 356, 361.

<sup>3</sup> The 3rd Company took over these workings from the 258th Company, R.E., and at the same time handed over its northernmost workings to the 257th Company, R.E.

<sup>4</sup> See Vol. XII, plates 357-8

<sup>5</sup> Lieut. H. Russel, M.C.; 3rd Tun. Coy. Licensed surveyor and mine manager; of Cottesloe, W. Aust.; b. Highgate London, 11 March, 1873. Died of wounds, 23 Jan., 1918

<sup>6</sup> The rescue work was organised by Lieutenant O. R. Howie (Collie, W. Aust.)

<sup>7</sup> A brave rescue was effected by Sapper E. Bird (Kalgoorlie, W. Aust.) and a comrade who, after getting clear, found that another man had been left behind, and went back and brought him out.

21st. Lieutenant D'Arcy Wentworth<sup>8</sup> and several men were wounded and knocked unconscious, but Wentworth, recovering, managed to get to the head of the shaft and start the fan to keep back the poisonous gas, and his men were rescued. Early in January the deep levels became flooded. On the surface the Germans raided and tried to blow up several of the shafts, and took 50 prisoners, including 7 tunnellers.<sup>9</sup> In January and February 1917 the mines were gradually unwatered with electric pumps and underground fighting continued. Casualties in the mines were now much fewer.<sup>10</sup> It had now been determined to stop German mining at Hill 70. Accordingly on March 7th, when it was judged that certain German galleries were within reach, three *camouflets* were blown. German records show that these smashed thirteen feet of the "Imgard" gallery, but no lives were lost. The Germans answered by raiding on March 18th and trying to blow up a mine-shaft. Their charge, however, failed to explode. On March 26th, after blowing a charge of 11,000 lb. of ammonal at a depth of 125 feet, the Australians finally closed the gap in the defensive system.

It was at this stage that the Arras offensive was launched, and the Germans swung back their line across Hill 70. The 3rd Australian Tunnelling Company took over from the 173rd Company, R.E., the area of the hinge. Mining practically ceased, and, although the listeners were kept on strain to detect any sign of the enemy attempting to enter his old workings, now beneath No-Man's Land and the British line, the company's work now mainly consisted of road-making and carrying for trench-mortar batteries.<sup>11</sup> An "investigation detachment" of 3 officers and 60 others searched the old German trenches and dugouts for trap-mines. This detachment was also useful when the Germans on June 24th, anticipating attack, abandoned part of their other positions in front of Lens.<sup>12</sup> But at the pivoting point on Hill 70 the Germans had so carefully and thoroughly destroyed the entrances to the workings that no trace of these could be found.

It is now known, from German records (extracted and furnished by the courtesy of the *Reichsarchiv*), that the German mining company (297th Pioneer) responsible for the Hill 70 mines attempted to take precisely the action that was feared by the British. The "Regensburg-Hans" galleries, which lay at the hinge of the withdrawal, were lightly charged at certain points and the entrances then destroyed beyond recognition. The leads were brought back through gallery "Hans" to a strong-point behind the second German line, and it was arranged with the regiment holding the sector, the 153rd I.R., that the mines should not be exploded until the British were definitely established in the old German front line. The German second line was under heavy bombardment, and the leads were broken as many as a dozen times daily; but they were mended, and at 12.30 a.m. on April 20 the firing was attempted. According to German accounts, the explosion was felt in the German trenches, and debris was thrown into the air; but, as neither the British infantry nor the Australian tunnellers reported any incident, it seems certain that the mines misshred.

Careful listening was maintained in the Australian galleries, and it was not until May that sounds of activity were heard in the German galleries. These were vague and distant until June 24th, when for

<sup>8</sup> Lieut. D'Arcy Wentworth, 3rd Tun. Coy. Metallurgist and mining engineer, of Sydney; b. Sydney, 20 June, 1876.

<sup>9</sup> Four of these were listeners returning from their work. They walked into the hands of the Germans, unconscious that a raid was in progress.

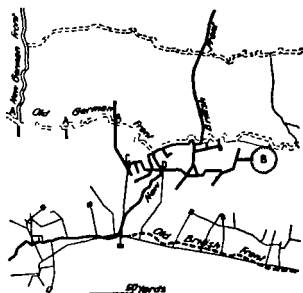
<sup>10</sup> Lieutenants J. W. L. Purves (Sydney) and R. J. Cavanagh (Cottesloe, W. Aust.) were caught on February 15 by a fall of chalk, due to a distant enemy *camouflet* (fired in the gallery known to the Germans as "Dora"), but both were rescued.

<sup>11</sup> In this phase the company suffered about 30 casualties.

<sup>12</sup> At the suggestion of Ludendorff (see p. 700).

three days Germans were heard walking in the galleries, apparently charging three mines. The British infantry was warned to keep clear of those trenches, and, as the only means of dealing with the menace, the tunnelling company arranged that under cover of a raid by the 11th Essex and 2nd Durham Light Infantry three parties of tunnellers should go out and destroy three known shafts in No-Man's Land and in the German lines.

The raid took place at 7.15 p.m. on 28th June 1917, and formed part



A-A-A German shafts destroyed in raid. B. German mines blown, July 8. C. British camouflet, July 27. D: German galleries entered, July 24.

of the general demonstration made that day in the Lens area. The parties, led by Captain Sanderson,<sup>13</sup> second-in-command of the company, destroyed the three shafts.<sup>14</sup> Major Coulter,<sup>15</sup> the commander of the company, returned from leave an hour or two before the start, and, hearing of the raid, came straight forward to take part. He went on into the German trenches and, to ensure that his men should have time to finish their work, he joined the party of infantry covering them. The Germans counter-attacked thrice, and during their second attempt, fighting at close quarters, this particularly fine leader and a companion, Sapper Griffin,<sup>16</sup> were killed.

Records of the 297th German Pioneer Company show that the galleries at the barricade, and part of the "Emul-Hans" gallery, were badly damaged by the explosion of the Australian charges. The German miners suffered no casualties.

After this raid the Australians tunnelled vigorously forward to break through into the German workings. The enemy heard them, and managed to connect up his leads to an untamped mine or mines already laid under the British trenches. He exploded this on July 8th, but the British infantry had been warned by the tunnellers to keep clear of that sector, and had only two men slightly wounded.<sup>17</sup> While work in the German galleries would still be hampered by the gas of this explosion, the Australians tunnelled forward and on July 24th broke through into the German system and captured it. For safety's sake, the connecting works under No-Man's Land were three days later entirely destroyed by the explosion of a deep camouflet of 10,000 lb. of ammonal. The mining struggle at Hill 70 ended, and No. 3 Company concentrated its effort upon providing underground headquarters and communication for the Canadian Corps, which took over the front for its feint of August 16th against Lens.

<sup>13</sup> Major A. Sanderson, D.S.O., M.C. Commanded 3rd Tun. Coy., 1917/18. Consulting engineer and mine manager; of Perth, W. Aust.; b. Oamaru, N.Z., 3 Dec., 1881.

<sup>14</sup> 2/Cpl. W. F. Bocksette (Perth and Westonia, W. Aust.) and Sapper J. Burns (East Fremantle, W. Aust.; died on 8 March, 1923) were also largely responsible.

<sup>15</sup> Major L. J. Coulter, D.S.O. Commanded 3rd Tun. Coy., 1916/17. Mining engineer; of Grenville, Vic.; b. Ballarat, Vic., 20 July, 1889. Killed in action, 28 June, 1917.

<sup>16</sup> Spr. F. M. Griffin (No. 1283; 3rd Tun. Coy.). Labourer; of Werribee, Vic., and Emmaville, N.S.W.; b. East Tylden, Vic., 1 Oct., 1879. Killed in action, 28 June, 1917.

<sup>17</sup> It seems possible that the Germans had ascertained that their mines had not exploded on April 20, and now fired them.

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**Siege Bde.** (36th Heavy Artillery Group), 962; command, June, 578n. **54th Siege Battery**, 262n, 745n, 962. **55th Siege Battery**, 262n, 704n, 745n, 867n, 903, 905; in Battle of Cambrai, 936-7. **338th Siege Battery**, 746n. **1st Div. Artillery**, 25,

33, 112, 414n, 731, 839n, 932; moves to Lagnicourt Vy., 8-9 Apr., 261; First Bullecourt, 11 Apr., 319; Germans break through to its guns, 15 Apr., 377-9, 382-3, 392-3, casualties, 393n; Second Bullecourt, May, 543n; Third Ypres: enters battle, July, 703,

704, 705-6, supports 30 Divn., 707-10, casualties, 20-22 July, 705-6, 709, position taken up, 31 July, (plate) 704, Battle of Menin Rd., 744n, 789n, Broodseinde, 844n, 876n, Passchendaele sector, 904-5. **2nd Div. Artillery**, in approach to Hindenburg Line,

29 Mar., 207n, Noreuil attack, 208; moves forward for First Bullecourt, 261; during German break-through, 15 Apr., 387-9, casualties, 393n; composition, Apr., 414n; Third Ypres, 729, enters battle, July, 703, 706, 707-8, supports 24 Divn., 704n, Battle of Menin Rd., 744n, 781, 789n, Broodseinde, 838, 839n, 856n, 876n, Passchendaele, 900n, 904-5. **3rd Div. Artillery**, at Messines, 682; Battle of Menin Rd., 744n, 760; Broodseinde, 839n; Passchendaele, 887,

903-4, 904-5, 928n. **4th Div. Artillery**, 28, 29-30, 208, 388n, 932n; supports attack on Stormy Tr., 4 Feb., 35; First Bullecourt, 261, 287, 319; composition, Apr., 414n; at Messines, 682, Third Ypres: enters battle, July,

703-4, 706, supports 47 Divn., 704n, casualties, 707, Battle of Menin Rd., 744n, Polygon Wd., 831n, Broodseinde, 839n, Passchendaele, 904-5. **5th Div. Artillery**, 29-30, 261n, 414n, 744n, 839n; supports attack on Stormy Tr., 4 Feb., 35, on Sunray Tr., 2 Mar., 111; in advance to Hind. Line, 157; disposition of groups, Apr., 358; composition, 11 Apr., 358n; attached to 1 Divn., 388n, 389n; Third Ypres, 730, enters battle, July, 703,

706, 707, supports 15 Divn., 704n, 710-11, Battle of Polygon Wd., 831n. **A.F.A. Brigades**: **1st**, 395n, 402, 414n; Germans break through to guns of Lagnicourt, 15 Apr., 379, 382, 383, 392-3; Third Ypres, 704n, 705, 708-10, Broodseinde, 839n, 2nd, 402, 414n; in advance to Hind. Line, 157; Germans overrun guns of Lagnicourt

15 Apr., 377-9, 382-3, 392-3; Third Ypres, 704n, 706, 708, Broodseinde, 839n, 18, 358n, 418, 528n, 962; in advance to Hind. Line, 157n; Battle of Menin Rd., 744n. **4th**,

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359, 414n; during approach to Hind. Line, 21-26 Mar., 189, Lagnicourt attack, 192n; First Bullecourt, 11 Apr., 319; Battle of Menin Rd., 744n; Broodseinde, 839n; Passchendaele, 904. **5th**, 414n; during approach to Hind. Line, 21-26 Mar., 189, Lagnicourt attack, 192n; Battle of Menin Rd., 744n; Broodseinde,

839n. **6th**, 18, 32n, 528n, 962, supports 62 Division at First Battle of Bullecourt, 11 Apr., 261; Battle of Menin Rd., 744n. **7th**, Battle of Menin Rd., 744n, Broodseinde, 839n; Passchendaele, 903. **8th**, Battle of Menin Rd., 744n; Broodseinde, 839n. **10th**, 32n, 414n; Third Ypres, 704n, Battle of Menin Rd., 744n, Broodseinde, 839n. **11th**, 414n; Third Ypres, 704n, Menin Rd., 744n, Broodseinde, 839n, Passchendaele, 905. **12th**, (Plate p. 192), 18,

28, 414n, 418, 528n, 962; supports Noreuil attack, 208; moves forward for First Bullecourt, 261, Battle of Menin Rd., 744n. **13th**, 358n; in advance to Hind. Line, 157; Third Ypres, 704n, 707n, 710, Broodseinde, 839n. **14th**, 358n, 414; in advance to Hind. Line, 157, 167, Lagnicourt attack, 26 Mar., 192n, Doignies and Louverval, 2 Apr., 223n, 230; during Ger. break through at Noreuil, 15 Apr., 388; Third Ypres, 704n, 710-11, 730, casualties, 31 July, 711, Battle of Broodseinde, 839n. **A.F.A. Batteries**: **1st**, 379n, 414n, 705, 708, 932n; **2nd**, 379n, 414n, 429n, 512n, 708, 709, 906; **3rd**, 91n, 379n, 414n, 705-6, 708; **4th**, 157n, 164, 166, 167n, 359n, 414n, 512n, 706, 708, 709, 932n, Germans overrun its guns, 15 Apr., 378, 392n, 393; **5th**, 414n, 708, 932, Germans overrun its guns, 15th Apr., 378, 393; **6th**, 414n, 706, 708, 709, 932n, Germans overrun its guns, 15 Apr., 377, 378, 393; **7th**, 223n, 230, 705n; **8th**, 171; **10th**, 414n, 468, 707n, 708n; **11th**, 414n, 932n; **12th**, 153, 177, 197-8, 387, 414n; **13th**, 177, 388n, 414n; **14th**, 198, 414n; **15th**, 414n, 720; **16th**, (plate) 753; **27th**, 585n; **29th**, 904, 906; **30th**, **31st**, 584n; **37th**, 414n, 680n; **38th**, 414n, 422n, 467n, 904; **39th**, **41st**, 414n, 904; **42nd**, 414n, 422n; **43rd**, 359, 388, 403, 414n, 422n; **45th**, 414n, 419n, 830n; **46th**, 414n; **47th**, 414n, 830n; **50th**, 223n; **51st**, 710, 711; **53rd**, 167, 192n, 230, 414n, 711; **54th**, 153, 157, 167n, 192n, 414n; **55th**, 157n, 167n, 192n, 231, 414n; **101st**, 91n, 320, 379n, 387, 389n, 414n, 512, 704n, 706, 906; **102nd**, 414n, 512n, 708, 709, 906, Germans overrun its guns, 15 Apr., 382-3, 393; **104th**, 388n, 414n; **105th**, 414n, (plate) 705; **106th**, 358n, **110th**, 414n, 680n, 904; **111th**, 414n; **113th**, 704n, 707n; **114th**, 167n, 414n. **Div. Ammunition Columns**: **1st**, 905-6; **3rd**, 811n, 836n; **4th**, 584n, 836n; **5th**, 153, 811n. See also **ARTILLERY**

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—CHAPLAINS, 911n  
 —CYCLISTS CORPS: **I Anzac Cyclist Bn.**, 167, 170n, 418; **II Anzac Cyclist Bn.**, 677n  
 —Dépôts: **A.I.F. Depots in the United Kingdom**, M'Cay commands, 24  
 —ENGINEERS, 261, 358, 363, 431, (plate) 792, 838, 930n; work on Bapaume road, Mar., 145, 255, in Flanders, Sept.-Oct., 792-5, 903. **Divisional Engineers:** 1st, 788n, 866, 867, 876n, road and railway work, Sept., 792-5; 2nd, 788n, 789n, 876n, 900n; road and railway work, Sept., 792-5; 3rd, 657, 682, 841, 928n; 4th, 682, 792n, 831n; 5th, road and railway work, Sept., 792-5. **Field Companies:** 1st, 789n, 867; 2nd, 774, 789n, 934; 3rd, 774, 789n; 4th, 829n, 931n; 5th, 485, 519-20, 543n, 774, 785n, 780n; 6th, 153, 181n, 543n, 789n; 7th, 427, 543n, 774, 789n, 795n, 867n; 8th, 541n, 831n; 10th, 886; 11th, 713n, 886; 12th, 646n, 831n; 13th, 205n, 206n, 645, 829n, 831n; 14th, 153, 534, 539-40, 825n, 829n, 831n; 15th, 829n, 831n. **I Anzac R.E. Workshops:** (Plate 417), 417, 418. See also *Tunnelling Corps* (below).  
 —FLYING CORPS, see AUST. FLYING CORPS  
 —INFANTRY (Plates pp. 16, 17, 24, 25, 128, 329, 737, 752, 785, 864, 865, 928), new platoon organisation, 18; work on Bapaume road, 11-18 Mar., 145. **1st Brigade** (N.S.W.; 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th Bns.), 25, 39, 206n, 225n, 238, 247n, 357n, 361, 362, 420n, 731n, 837; bde. command, 25n; bn. commands, 25n, 238, 240n, 370n; relieves 3 Bde., 27 Feb., 94-5; attacked, 2 Mar., 107-9; captures Hermies and Demicourt, 9 Apr., 232-3, 238-49; Germans attack posts of, 15 Apr., 363-70, 371, 372n, 393, 396-7; salvage work of, 417n; Second Bullecourt, 475, 504n, 520, Col. I. G. Mackay commands, 506, strength of bns., 476n, attached to 2 Divn., 430, digs commun. trench, 3 May, 474, dispositions and plans, 4 May, 480, 492, 496, relieves 6 Bde., 487, 491, during fourth Ger. c/attack, 492-5, bombs up O.G. lines, 495-501, during fifth c/attack, 503-5, concentrates in left sector, 4-5 May, 505-6, local c/attacks against, 5 May, 509-10, repulses sixth c/attack, 6 May, 511, 513, 515-8, inter-battalion reliefs, 521; Battle of Menin Road, 746n, 750, 761, 762, 785, 787n, 788; 14 Bde. relieves, 22 Sept., 797n; Battle of Broodseinde, 841n, 842n, 844n, 849n, 852, 854n, 857, 860, 861, 867n; casualties, 367, 393n, 510n, 544n, 789n, 876n. In air raids, Oct., 839n, 932n. **2nd Brigade** (Vic.; 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th Bns.), 20n, 23n, 39n-40n, 94, 400n, 731n, 801; enters Bayonet Tr. and Luisenhof Fm., 24-25 Feb., 73, 77n, Oat Lane, 78, during Ger. retirement on Somme, 24 Feb., 81n; occupies Barley Tr.,

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26 Feb., 91, links up with 1 Bde., 27 Feb., 95; outpost fighting, 2 Mar., 106-7, 109; Second Bullecourt, attached to 2 Divn., 414, 427-8, 430, 491, relieves 1st Bde. in left sector, 7 May, 525, bombs along O.G. 2, 8 May, 526, 15 Bde. relieves, 9 May, 527; Battle of Menin Road, 746n, 751, 754, 755n, 756, 762-3, 769, 771-2, 773, 776 et seq., 783n, 784n, 786, 787n, 790, 798, Battle of Broodseinde, 841n, 842n, 844n, 849n, 853, 854-5, 856, 857, 861, 866, 868n; Passchendaele attack, 26 Oct., 934-5; casualties, 544n, 789n, 876n, 935n. **3rd Brigade** (Q'land, S. Aust., W. Aust., Tas., 9th, 10th, 11th, 12th Bns.), 62, 64, 65, 67, 73, 74, 92, 357n, 361, 362, 363, 395n, 396n, 400, 401, 648n, 674n, 720n, 731n, 752n, 891n; command, 23n; enters Maze, 24 Feb., 70-1; approaches Le Barque, 25 Feb., 77-8, 79, 81-2, 86n, projected attack postponed, 26 Feb., 90, 91, enters village, 27 Feb., 93-5; 1 Bde. relieves, 27 Feb., 94-5; attacks Bourais, 8 Apr., 233-7, 381, 9 Apr., 237-8, 247, 249; Germans break through its line Lagnicourt, 15 Apr., 364-5, 370 et seq., 381-4, 386, 388, 389-93, 397-9; Second Bullecourt, 491, 509n, 519n, Col. Mullen commands, 506, moves up to reserve, 4 May, 492, relieves 1 Bde. in right sector, 4-5 May, 505-6, 507, maintains position, 5 May, 508-12, repulses sixth c/attack, 6 May, 510-5, 516-7, 9 Bn. enters extreme left, 6 May, 520-1, 522-4, 526, 14 Bde. relieves, 8 May, 527; Battle of Menin Rd., 746n, 753, 754, 760, 764-5, 767n, 769, 773, 776, 777, 778n, 784n, 786n, 787, plans, 751, approaches j.-o. position, 755-6; Passchendaele attacks, 6 & 9 Oct., 899-900; casualties, 390, 393n, 509n, 510n, 525n, 544n, 789n, 876n, 900. **4th Brigade** (All States; 13th, 14th, 15th, 16th Bns.), 294, 346n, 488n, 616n, 630n, 657, 680n, 712n, 798n; 15 Bn. attacks Cloudy Tr., 1-2 Feb., 27-31, 32; captures Stormy Tr., 4-5 Feb., 31-7; 12 Bde. relieves, Feb., 38; efficiency of, 293-4; First Bullecourt, 421, 434, 508n, plans, 275, 288, 289n, preparations, 275-7, 281, 290 et seq., 10 Apr. operation, 279-83, battle, 11 Apr., 293-303, 305, 307 et seq., 316-7, 319, 320, 353, Capt. Murray's report, 316-7, 326, German c/attacks, 323-6, 329-35, 337-8, 339, 347-9; Battle of Messines, 677-8; Battle of Polygon Wood, 797, 828, 829, 830; casualties, 37n, 247n, 343, 543n, 682n, 831n. **5th Brigade** (N.S.W.; 17th, 18th, 19th, 20th Bns.), 24, 61 et seq., 73, 86, 96, 108n, 175, 205n, 206n, 480, 731, 866n; command, 25n; during Ger. retirement on Somme: enters trenches near Butte, 24-25 Feb., 70-1, probes forward, 78-9, 81-2, efforts to secure Malt Tr., 83-4, 89-91, enters Malt & Malt Support, 26-27 Feb., 92-3, 96, 97, 100, 101-2, driven from Layton

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Alley, 2 Mar., 103, (17 Bn. recaptures) 105, 27 Bn. joins up with, in Malt Tr., 2 Mar., 104-5, relieves 7 Bde., 12 Mar., 115, 116, 117, action, 12-13 Mar., 116, 117, 118, approaches R.II line, 13-17 Mar., 119, 123, enters Biefvillers, 17 Mar., 123-4; approaches Hind. Line, 17-18 Mar., 151, 174; during 7 Bde's attack on Lagnicourt, 26 Mar., 199; Germans break through 17 Bn's posts, 15 Apr., 364-5, 374, 375, 379-81, 384 *et seq.*; 7 Bde relieves, 20 Apr., 419; Second Bullecourt: plans, 421, 423-5, 428, preparations, 425-6, 429, approaches j.o. position, 431-2, launches attack 3 May, 433-6, 437, 444, 447-9, fails to reach first objective, 436, 443, 446, 451, 452, second attempt fails, 454, bombing attempts, 454-6, German c/attacks, 461, 462, 465, 466-7, 469-70, 28 Bn. joins, in O.G. Lines, 471-3, 476 *et seq.*, and withdraws with it, 481, 487, 492; Battle of Menin Rd., 746, 753, 765 *et seq.*, 774 *et seq.*, 784, 785, 787, 788, plans, 771-2, approaches j.o. position, 752, attacks, 757; Passchendaele attack, 9 Oct., rôle, 889, strength, 890, gains first objective, 891-5, 898-9; casualties, 390, 393, 448, 543, 577, 789, 876, 890, 900. **6th Brigade** (Vic.), 21st, 22nd, 23rd, 24th Bns.), 25, 62, 79, 82, 206, 389, 419, 731, 798; command, 71, 897, 902; during Ger. retirement on Somme: probes forward, 24 Feb., 71, 72, attacks towards Malt Tr., 25 Feb., 83, 84-6, 96, 7 Bde. relieves, 26 Feb., 96, enters R.I line, 12 Mar., 115, 116, patrols encircle Gréville and approach Bapaume, 13-17 Mar., 117, 119, passes over R.II line and enters Avesnes, 17 Mar., 123-4; during approach to Hind. Line, 126, 144, 153, 161, 162, 163, 164, 174-7, 179-88, 7 Bde. relieves, 188; Second Bullecourt: plans, 421, 423-5, 428, 441-2, preparations, 425-6, 429, approaches j.o. position, 431-2, launches attack, 3 May, 433, 434, 436-46, 448-9, gains half of first objective, 439, holds on, 456-9, 467, Maxfield's party reaches second objective, 442, 445, 446, 459-60, 465, 467, (retires) 468, fired on by own guns, 468, first German c/attack, 461-2, 465-6, second c/attack, 469-70, 28 Bn. takes over part of 5 Bde's sector held by 6th, 471, reorganises position, 476-7, third c/attack, 479-80, bombs along O.G. Lines, 478-9, holds on, after 5 & 7 Bdes. withdraw, 481-2, fourth c/attack, 4 May, 487, 492, 494, its achievement, 482-6, 487, 488, 542, 1 Bde. relieves, 487, 503, remains in support, 492, 520, digs comm. trs. on flanks, 4 May, 502, 504, 506, (near Noreuil) 527, Battle of Menin Rd., 750, 785, 788; Battle of Broodseinde, 844, 848, 849, 853, 854, 855-6, 857, 859, 861-2, 863, 866, 867, 868, 24 Bn. position, (plates) 864, 865; exhausted condition of, after attack, 890, 891;

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Passchendaele attack, 9 Oct.: rôle, 889, gains essential part of objective, 890, 891, 893, 895-9; casualties, 543, 789, 876, 900. **7th Brigade** (Q'land, S. Aust., W. Aust., Tas.; 25th, 26th, 27th, 28th Bns.), 39, 74, 82, 114, 354, 415, 427, 475, 483, 485, 501, 731; during Ger. retirement on Somme: relieves 6 Bde., 26 Feb., 96, attempts capture Malt Tr., 27-28 Feb., 97-8, captures it, 2 Mar., 98-105, enters R.I line, 12 Mar., 115, 116, 117, in divnl. reserve, 17 Mar., 153; relieves Gellibrand's column, 20 Mar., 177, 188; morale of, 189; captures Lagnicourt, 26 Mar., 188-205; 13 Bde. relieves, 208-9; relieves 5 & 6 Bdes., 20 Apr., 419; men of, at Noreuil, 23 Apr., (plate) 329; Second Bullecourt: plans, 424, 430, 453, attacks, 3 May, 447-8, 454, 455, 456, 474, first Ger. c/attack, 461-2, 467, second c/attack, 470, 28 Bn. joins 5 Bde. in O.G. Lines, 471-3, 476 *et seq.*, (withdraws) 481, 485, 486, 492, 493, 14 Bde. relieves, 8 May, 527; Battle of Menin Rd., 746, 755, 760, 765, 766, 769-70, 772, 774, 776, 777-8, 784, 787, (plate) 785, plans, 751-2, approaches j.o. position, 754, 757; Battle of Broodseinde, 838, 844, 848, 867, 868, 870-1, 874, 875, plans, 838, 841, fighting at Daisy Wd., 862-3; exhausted condition of, 890-1; Passchendaele attack, 9 Oct., 897-8; casualties, 203, 448, 543, 789, 836, 876, 891, 900, 932. **8th Brigade** (N.S.W., Vic., Q'land, S. Aust., W. Aust.; 29th, 30th, 31st, 32nd Bns.), 61, 63, 91, 206, 225, 400, 533, 539, 596, 833; during Ger. retirement on Somme: Sunray Tr., 73, 110-11, relieves 5 Bde., 12 Mar., 115, action, 13-16 Mar., 118, 119-20, 122; advances through Bapaume, 17 Mar., 125-6, 144, (plate) 128, progress impeded before R.IIa line, 152; approaches Hind. Line, 20-22 Mar., 165, 166, 167; repulses c/attack, 23 Mar., 167-70; during 7 Bde's attack on Lagnicourt, 26 Mar., 202; Battle of Polygon Wd., 813-24, 826, rôle, 809-12, casualties, 831. **9th Brigade** (N.S.W.; 33rd, 34th, 35th, 36th Bns.), 568, 571, 836, 870, 933; in Armentières sector: enters line, 27 Nov., 1916, 563, raids Ger. trenches, Dec.-Feb., 564, 566, Germans raid, Jan.-Mar., 569; raids Ger. trenches, 28 May-1 June, 586; Germans raid, 17-18 May, 570; Battle of Messines: plans, 576, 577, preparations, 586, approaches j.o. position, 590-1, 593, launches attack, 7 June, 593, 595, 596-7, reaches Black Line, 602-4, 607, 608, 609, 630, 649, 659, 660, plans for advance to Oosttaverne Line, 665, advances posts, 665-6, 668, reaches Oost. Line, 10 June, 674-6, 678; relieves 11 Bde., 11 July, 713, 715, 11 Bde. relieves, 30 July, 716; Passchendaele attack, 12 Oct., 920, 927, 934, rôle, 909, bns. approach

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